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ABSTRACT

A project was conducted in Australia to investigate the most effective ways whereby learners receive informal and formal support to assist them to successfully complete vocational education and training (VET), either in school or in business job-training programs. Data were collected through a literature review, a case study of 11 organizations, and a workshop focus group. Some of the findings of the study were the following: (1) many similar types of learner support existed in VET institutions and in businesses, although more support was available in the VET institutions; (2) key indicators of learner support included an attitude of valuing people, the right individuals in key positions, a planned and funded approach to learner support, a formal orientation, incentives for learners, support from senior management, organizational support for trainers, and a flexible learner-centered approach; (4) similar types of learner support were successful in both VET institutions and in businesses. Explanation of study methodology and the case studies are appended to the document. (Contains 67 references.) (KC)

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Supporting learners in training

Ann Montague

Linda Hopkins

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Executive summary

Introduction and purpose

The purpose of this project was to investigate the most effective ways whereby learners receive informal and formal support to assist them to successfully complete vocational education and training (VET) within both vocational education and training institutions and enterprises.

The project sought to explore:

- similarities and differences between support by enterprises and VET institutions and whether both are meeting learners' needs
- whether informal support provided by enterprise trainers is equivalent to the formal support provided by VET institutions
- whether the teaching/learning situations in VET institutions are so different from those of workplaces that the support needs are also different
- the level of variation amongst VET institutions and enterprises in their provision of learner support
- the potential impact of the [illegible]f group training companies on the availability of learner support
- the way integrated on- and-off-the-job training provides learners and enterprises with 'the best of both worlds' in relation to supporting learning

The key audiences for this project are TAFE and private VET institutions, workplace trainers and assessors from both small and large enterprises, VET policy-makers and funding bodies, as well as writers of support materials for training packages.

Methodology

The project identified the characteristics of organisations to be included in the study, and subsequently selected VET institutions and enterprises that were recognised by the project reference group for the high quality of their education and training and/or learner support.

A total of 11 organisations participated in the study, with a further two piloting the research tools. A case study approach was taken in order to look at organisations in depth.

A literature review was used to inform the development of the research tools. These tools were used to collect data about the training/learning environments of both VET providers and enterprises. The research tools took the form of structured interview questions which were used in both group and individual interviews with a broad sample of stakeholders from each participating organisation. The data gathered are reported in a case study format that highlights the main issues identified in the interviews.

A workshop of participants was convened which acted as a forum for the participants to share and compare their learner support strategies with other organisations involved in the project. The final key indicators of successful learner support, identified by the project team with reference to the literature review were developed and refined by workshop participants. Participants also made some recommendations for further research.

Findings

The findings are based on a relatively small sample of institutions selected for the high quality of their learner support strategies; the results should therefore be taken as indicative rather than definitive. However, they do offer some insights which may prove useful to the various target audiences identified earlier.

- A wide range of different types of formal and informal learner support was identified across the VET institutions and enterprises involved in the study.
- There are many similarities between learner support available in VET institutions and enterprises.
- Differences identified between VET institutional provision and that of enterprises involved in this study resulted mainly from the differing roles of the institutions themselves: teaching and concomitant support of students is the core business of VET institutions while support strategies developed within enterprises must coexist with and add value to their core business.
- While both VET institutions and enterprises provided many examples of formal and informal support, there was far more formal learner support available in the VET institutions.
- There was considerable variation between all the of organisations in how learner support is provided.
- The level of support provided by the private and public VET institutions was very similar.
- Learners in both VET institutions and enterprises believe that support services have an important impact on their success in learning and in enabling them to overcome obstacles to learning.
- Teachers at all four VET institutions studied felt increased retention rates and completion rates were the direct result of the provision of appropriate support to learners.
- Group training companies have an important role in establishing apprenticeships and traineeships and a continuing role in ensuring they run smoothly by providing a source of support and assistance to both host employers and the apprentices/trainees.
- All participants agreed that they could learn from each other and appreciated the opportunity to do so and reported gaining a great deal from their involvement in the participant workshop.
- Integrated on- and off-the-job training provides learners and enterprises with 'the best of both worlds' in relation to learning support in terms of improved learning experiences, range of learning environments and access to a wider range of support.
- Good working relationships between VET institutions and enterprises require ongoing commitment, effective communication processes and consistent communication channels.

A set of key indicators and accompanying descriptors for successful learner support was developed.

Key indicators of effective learner support

The large proportion of key indicators of effective learner support relate to the various types of organisational features and learning cultures within institutions necessary for the development of support systems for learners. Indicators 11 to 14 encompass learning and teaching strategies which have proved successful within institutions.

1. Valuing people
2. The right individuals in key positions
3. A planned, systematic and funded approach to learner support

4. A formal induction/orientation process
5. Support from senior management
6. Incentives for learners
7. An open system with access for all
8. Everyone seen as a learner and a trainer
9. A critical ratio of experienced people to foster learning
10. Organisational support for trainers
11. Embedding learner support in training provision
12. A flexible learner-centred approach
13. A clear single communication point
14. Co-operative partnerships between trainers and workplace staff.

Conclusion

This research found that a number of the enterprises studied had considered and established workplace support strategies and a 'learning environment' that fostered training and supported learners.

Both enterprise training personnel and VET institution support staff who attended the participant workshop were well aware of the necessity for learner support and the factors that make it successful. It was this knowledge and experience that contributed towards the development of the key indicators for successful learner support.

An important finding of this study is the similarity between what makes learner support successful in workplaces and VET institutions. The different environments shape the strategies that are established, but both must have the goal of the creation of a supportive learning environment, one that encourages and motivates learners to achieve success.

The key indicators of successful learner support developed by the study begin to answer the question: 'How best should students receive support (informal and formal) to assist them enter and successfully complete vocational education and training?' The project findings contribute to the debate on the provision of support to learners. If an organisation has a large number of the key indicators in place, it is likely to be providing learner support in a way that meets the needs of its learners and sustains effective training outcomes.

Introduction and purpose

With increased emphasis on training in the workplace and the integration of accredited training provided by VET institutions—both public and private providers—and inhouse and/or formal training by enterprises, it is timely to consider the place of services offered to support learners in their training. Traditionally the TAFE sector has offered support to learners within TAFE institutes and this has been well documented. Support offered to learners in the workplace has not been extensively investigated.

Project proposal

The purpose of the project was to investigate how best learners should receive informal and formal support to assist them enter and successfully complete vocational education and training within vocational education and training (VET) institutions[1] and enterprises that train their employees.

The project sought to explore:

- similarities and differences between support offered by enterprises and VET institutions and whether both are meeting learners' needs
- whether informal support, provided by enterprise trainers is equivalent to the formal support provided by VET institutions
- whether the teaching/learning situations in VET institutions are so different from workplaces that the support needs are also different
- the level of variation in provision of learner support amongst VET institutions and enterprises
- the potential impact of the use of group training companies on the availability of learner support
- ways VET institutions and enterprise trainers can learn from each other by carrying out process benchmarking
- the way integrated on-and-off-the-job training provides learners and enterprises with 'the best of both worlds' in relation to supporting learning

Definitions

Support for learners has tended to be termed 'student services' by VET institutions. According to Anderson (ESSSC 1995a), developing a clear definition of 'student services' in TAFE is considered problematic as there is no common or agreed definition, and opinions differ about what should be included. Student services have been defined as the specific functions which aim to:

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[1] The term 'VET institution' has been used throughout this report to distinguish organisations which provide vocational education and training as their core business from organisations termed 'enterprises' whose core business is manufacturing or service delivery but who also provide training to support the business enterprise. Where both VET institutions and enterprises are included, the term 'organisation' is used.

- facilitate access of potential, current and former students to courses and services
- Contribute to students' study success and social and personal development
- facilitate students' vocational education and training for employment (ESSC 1995a)

This Education and Student Services Committee (ESSC) report listed the key components of TAFE student services as:

- information services
- educational support services
- counselling services
- employment services
- health and recreation services
- strategic support services
- childcare services
- library services

There is some variation in what policy-makers include in this list. The Student Services Committee (SSC) identified services provided by TAFE in each State; for example, New South Wales provision included prison liaison, sexual harassment, overseas students while Northern Territory included health care (SSC 1997a).

These services could be defined as formal learner support as they are identified and provided as a service to students/learners usually with specific financial resources allocated for their operation. The support has generally been an 'add on' to the learning provision and heavily reliant on a centralised campus delivery model. These centralised services may also be used by enterprises referring their learners for formal support (for example, employees consulting TAFE counsellors for vocational information). Formal learner support also occurs in enterprises through such activities as formalised mentoring where specific time and resources are allocated to the support. An enterprise may include other significant features in a list of support services to their learners, such as the payment of wages/salary while undertaking training, provision of special equipment for private or time off work to study.

By contrast, informal learner support would include unstructured activities such as providing guidance and feedback conducted by teachers, supervisors, workmates or colleagues whether in the college, classroom or workplace.

For both formal and informal support, the service offered may directly support learners to complete a module or course (for example, structured literacy tuition, informal practice on the job) or by improving the general well-being of the learner, indirectly support them to succeed (for example, counselling services, support by peers).

For the purpose of this study, learning included accredited or non-accredited vocational education and/or training. Therefore it included apprenticeships, traineeships, certificate and diploma study as well as orientation sessions and OH&S training conducted by enterprises. In many enterprises it is difficult to distinguish between informal support and mentoring of learners by supervisors or colleagues from the provision of training.

We need to be mindful of the distinction between formal and informal support, different views on what constitutes support and in fact the distinction between support and the provision of training, particularly in the workplace where these activities may merge.

For the purposes of this study learner support is defined broadly as the range of support services which enable learners to participate in and complete training. The list of components to be included as appropriate support services was left open for case study respondents to define.

Project purpose

The project provides VET stakeholders with a snapshot of how support services are currently being approached across a range of VET providers and industry areas and how these support services are defined. This analysis of learner support provision is useful in describing how learner support can contribute to *quality* vocational education and training.

The key audiences for this project are TAFE and private VET organisations, workplace training and assessment practitioners from both small and large enterprises, VET policy-makers and funding bodies, as well as developers of training package resources.

The project findings contribute to the debate on the development and evaluation of appropriate support services and will provide a focus for organisations to consider how best to provide support to learners.

Project outcome

Fourteen key indicators of effective learner support were identified by analysis of the case studies and through the literature review. These were subsequently refined after extensive discussions at the participants' workshop.

Key indicators 1–10 relate to the types of organisational and learning culture features considered necessary for fostering effective learner support structures. Indicators 11–14 identify key strategies related to specific teaching and learning practices within an organisation.

Key indicator 1: Valuing people

An organisational culture which demonstrates that people are its most important resource; individual learners recognise that they are valued by the organisation

Key indicator 2: The right individuals in key positions

Individual staff members in the organisation who take responsibility for learner support and/or ensure support systems are in place for individuals and groups of learners

Key indicator 3: A planned, systematic and funded approach to learner support

A system for providing sufficient and appropriate resources for learner support

Key indicator 4: A formal induction/orientation process

All new learners and trainees formally and effectively inducted into the organisation, including support arrangements

Key indicator 5: Support from senior management

Organisational culture encourages learner support at all levels; learner support an expected and measurable outcome of the work of all relevant members of the organisation

Key indicator 6: Incentives for learners

Reasons provided for learners to want to learn and perform to the best of their ability, ranging from work opportunities to individual feedback, pay increases and prizes

Key indicator 7: An open system with access for all

Transparent system of learning and support, clearly visible to all and accessible for all members of the organisation

Key indicator 8: Everyone is seen as a learner and trainer

An organisational culture in which divisions between learners and trainers are minimised and in which most members are both learners and trainers; no-one is afraid to ask for and to provide support

Key indicator 9: A critical ratio of experienced people to foster learning

Learning facilitated in many ways by experienced people in the organisation and suffers when numbers of these people are reduced below a critical ratio; in VET institutions, a critical ratio of full and part-time training staff is required to provide continuity of support

Key indicator 10: Organisational support for trainers

An organisational culture in which trainers supported adequately in order to be able to support learners; their contribution recognised and valued

Key indicator 11: Embedding learner support in training provision

Learner support an integral part of training provision for all learners not a separate service used only by those identified as 'in need'; checking progress, looking for problems, identifying and solving these in the early stages, part of the experience of every learner

Key indicator 12: A flexible learner-centred approach

Training organised around learners' needs, based on adult learning principles, delivered flexibly, and meets the special needs of individual learners; assessment precedes learning so that training is implemented only to fill genuine needs

Key indicator 13: A clear, single communication point

A co-ordinated approach to learner support so all learners know exactly how and where support is available and who to contact about it

Key indicator 14: Co-operative partnerships between trainers and workplace

The organisation encourages co-operative partnerships between dedicated training staff and workplace staff to support each other's efforts and those of learners both within and between organisations; for example, co-operation between employing organisations and VET institutions.

Methodology

Reference group

The first meeting of the reference group refined and endorsed the scope of the project and identified potential participating organisations. The project team and the reference group held regular face-to-face and teleconference meetings.

At the initial meeting, reference group members discussed the parameters of 'learner support' in relation to data collection. Throughout the project the reference group has provided endorsement of the methodology, suggestions for potential case study sites and guidance on the research findings and the draft report.

Literature review

Published and unpublished literature on the provision of learner support in VET institutions and enterprises was reviewed. A considerable body of literature exists in relation to learner support services provided by TAFE institutions. However, there has been very little written about how private providers support their students. The body of research about how workplaces support their learners is similarly small, although a number of research projects is currently in progress.

The literature review was used to inform the development of the research tools and to provide validation for the analysis in the section, 'Discussion and findings'.

Case studies

A case study approach was adopted. As the literature on the provision of integrated learner support (as distinct from specific learner support facilities such as child care services, libraries and canteens) by non-TAFE VET institutions and enterprises was meagre, it was decided to investigate a small number of organisations in depth. The organisations asked to participate in the project were recognised as:

- providing quality education and training
- providing quality learner support
- stressing the importance of providing appropriate learner support

It was anticipated that, through these organisations, the project would identify and be able to describe successful learner support processes and systems.

Criteria for selection of cases

Planning for the project began with the identification of the characteristics of VET institutions and enterprises to be included in the study. It was decided that a range of institutions, enterprises and geographical locations would be included, within the constraints of the project budget.

Cases would include:

- TAFE and private VET institutions, large and small providers in metropolitan and regional/country locations, offering conventional course delivery and self-paced and/or flexible delivery
- public and private enterprises, large and small, in metropolitan and regional/country locations in Queensland, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT
- a group training company (GTC)

Other variables that would be considered were:

- whether enterprises were registered training organisations (RTOs)
- whether enterprises had formal training systems in place
- the range of training provided by VET institutions and enterprises
- the use of VET providers by enterprises, and the relationships established with them

It was decided to target VET institutions and enterprises recognised by the reference group the high quality of the education and training and/or learner support provided. The aim was to highlight the good learner support practices these organisations had established.

Types of learner support

At the first reference group meeting it was determined that the investigation would cover the support provided once training had commenced. Student selection, the provision of course information to potential students and student enrolment were not included. It was considered outside the project resources to access people before they became students for interview about their experiences. It was also decided not to target the provision of specific learner support *facilities* like child care centres, libraries, canteens or student associations. However, if these facilities were mentioned in discussion with trainers/teachers and learners, they would be reported.

Reference group members and the researchers agreed that learner support would be investigated with relation to:

- access to college facilities and learning environments for learners with special needs, such as people with disabilities or those living in rural and remote areas
- information services provided: matching learner to program, assessment of learner needs
- financial incentives provided
- study skills assistance
- impact of work and time constraints
- study leave provision
- literacy/numeracy/English language support
- counselling/mentoring/coaching support
- motivational issues
- peer support
- learning resources
- other issues which might arise during the interviews

The researchers did not provide the case study participants with a definition of learner support. They did not wish to pre-empt the types of processes and factors which might be identified by the participants as significant.

Selection of participants

Potential participating organisations were nominated by Vocational Education and Assessment Centre (VEAC) staff, Qualsearch Solutions, and reference group members using the criteria outlined. State training authorities were canvassed for organisations which were considered to have good learner support systems.

Potential participants were contacted by telephone, informed about the project and asked whether they would be interested in participating. Once initial interest was gained, a researcher visited each potential participant to secure their involvement. Information was provided to inform potential participants about the project and the nature of their involvement (see appendix C).

Securing participation of enterprises which exemplify good practice in learner support was more difficult than anticipated. It took longer to achieve, and was more expensive than expected. Private enterprises in Australia are operating in a highly competitive, 'cut throat' market place in which participation in research is often considered a luxury. Consequently, it was difficult to ensure the full range of organisations originally anticipated for the research.

A full list of participating organisations and their characteristics can be found in appendix A.

Research tools

The following was taken into account in developing the research tool:

- It was decided that the most effective method for determining the extent and type of learner support was to conduct individual and group structured interviews with a wide cross-section of people in each VET provider and enterprise. Therefore, the research tool had to be suitable for both group and individual interviews.
- Since it would appear that the ability to provide learner support depends on the size and budget of the VET provider or enterprise, it was decided to include small, medium and large organisations in the project. Therefore, the research tool had to be applicable to small and large VET providers and enterprises.
- As it was anticipated that different views would be expressed by the providers of support, compared with its recipients, the design of the research tools had to be suitable for learners and teachers/trainers/support providers.
- The tool had to encompass the training/learning environments of both VET institutions and enterprises.

A list of topics and issues that could form the basis of structured interview questions was developed and tested with groups of learners and trainers at the Northern Beaches Campus of Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE and the NSW Corrective Services Academy. Following this, the project team refined the issues and questions and developed a loose interview schedule.

The interview schedules were piloted at the Harrison Group and the Corrective Services Academy with learners and trainers. Each interview session lasted 45–50 minutes. Final versions were then designed for use with the participating organisations.

Collection of case study data

Approximately two days were spent at the larger organisations, and half to one day at the smaller ones. Each participating organisation was asked to arrange for a wide range of learners and trainers/teachers/support providers/management to be available for one hour for group and individual interviews.

Each interview schedule included all of the possible areas and questions to be investigated. Some were relevant to enterprises only; others only to VET institutions. Others were applicable to large but not small enterprises. These schedules are included as appendix D.

The selection and composition of the informant groups at each site varied depending on size of the organisation and whether it was a VET institution or an enterprise. At a large VET institution, for example, students from a range of courses (childcare, business and technology, applied science and tourism and hospitality) were interviewed together. The teachers for those particular classes, a student co-ordinator, a student counsellor and a librarian were also interviewed in a group. At one of the large enterprise sites the assistant human resources manager, training co-ordinators, several supervisors/trainers, a team leader and two trainees were interviewed individually. At one of the small enterprises, the owner–operator, senior staff and apprentices were interviewed as one group.

Each interview was taped for later transcription, synthesis and analysis.

Process benchmarking

The project had hoped to use process benchmarking methodology to identify successful learner support processes, and to enable participants to learn from each other and improve the support for learners in their organisations.

Process benchmarking involves one or more organisations in analysing, evaluating and comparing the way they perform one, or a group of processes with the aim of improving their performance. The essential concept is that organisations learn from each other.

Process benchmarking activities were planned to take place at two stages of the project:

Stage 1: Two organisations (or in the case of NSW, three) to participate from each State/Territory. The aim was for the organisations in each State/Territory to compare and evaluate (that is, benchmark) their own and each other's learner support processes, work together and learn from each other both during the project and subsequently.

The initial benchmarking would occur during the data-gathering and interviewing. Representatives from both organisations would participate in the interviews, thereby learning about each other's processes and evaluating them from the responses given during the interviews.

Stage 2: A meeting was planned for representatives of all participating organisations. The aim was for all organisations to compare, evaluate and plan to improve their learner support processes. It was hoped that the organisations would form a network that would continue beyond the life of the project.

Ultimately and not unfortunately, lack of time and financial resources meant that this project was unable to utilise a benchmarking process as part of the methodology.

Analysis of data

Reducing and refining the data

Each case study was initially written up fully, and then in summary form, according to a format developed by the researchers. The format aimed to capture the key areas that were discussed during the interviews. Because of the diversity of the participating organisations, it was not possible to standardise the formatting for writing up each case study.

The cross-site analytic process to determine the key indicators is described below.

The researchers reviewed all of the case studies extensively in order to code and cluster common features of effective learner support. An initial list of about 50 features was

developed. These were then grouped according to whether they represented support at the individual or organisational level. From this list of 50, the researchers compiled a list of 17 features.

Validation of indicators through participant workshop

During the data collection/analysis stage, the researchers identified issues, activities and learner support processes they considered to be unique and/or particularly successful in each organisation. Representatives (generally the key contact for the case study organisation) were asked to address these at a workshop, originally intended as part of the process benchmarking methodology for this project. They were also asked to identify key indicators from their perspective, which were then compared with the original list compiled by the researchers. The synthesised list became the final set of key indicators. Participants also identified recommendations for further research.

Enterprise representatives included the Human Resources Manager (Movieworld, Maxitran), Training Manager (Totalcare), Managing Director (Advance Metal Products, Stuuts). Representatives from VET institutions included a counsellor (Canberra Institute of Technology), Dean of Studies (Martin College) and General Manager (Macarthur Group Training). Two organisations were unable to send representatives, due to work commitments.

During the course of the workshop many of the participants resolved problems that they had grappled with for some time. It was suggested that it would be very worthwhile if those who attended the workshop could work on exchange at each other's workplaces. The South Australian representatives from the two organisations began identifying improvement opportunities and planning their implementation.

Limitations of the study

Case study methodology has potential flaws particularly in relation to generalisability to across-site analytic work. As Huberman and Miles (1998) note: 'there is a danger that multiple cases [VET institutions and enterprises in this study] will be analysed at high levels of inference, aggregating out the local webs of causality and ending with a smoothed set of generalisations that may not apply to any single case' (Huberman & Miles 1998, p.194).

Huberman and Miles describe a tension between 'that of reconciling the particular and the universal: reconciling an individual case's uniqueness with the need to understand generic processes at work across cases' (p.194). Thus, it must be stated that the intention of this study and its methodology was to provide a snapshot of good practice in learner support, not to make comparisons between sites or to compare outcomes between students who were 'supported', and those who were not. Key indicators were agreed as fundamental to effective learner support by the group of experts who attended the participants' workshop at the conclusion of the project. This group is not a representative sample and it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the nature of learner support and its success factors. The findings and the key indicators derived are offered as a guide and as a basis for organisations to consider the role of learner support in their own organisations.

Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to identify guidelines, good practice, resources and strategies being used in the provision of:

- support services (for example, literacy, numeracy, English language, assistance in understanding content) to learners in government and private VET institutions undertaking training in both classroom and flexible delivery mode
- other support to learners (for example, counselling) in government and private VET institutions
- learning and other support to trainees and employees in enterprises undertaking training in the workplace.

The richest source of information about learner support needs relates to the TAFE system, which has an established history of service provision in this area, particularly for special needs groups. Much of the literature identified for this review focusses on TAFE provision. On the other hand, the literature search identified no information about services in private VET institutions. This was also reported by Anderson (1994). Historically, TAFE has a strong history of social equity, whereas the private training sector must be concerned primarily with increasing market share.

Not surprisingly, there is little comment in the literature about the provision of learner support by enterprises. While on-the-job training has always been integral to an enterprise's operation, it is only since the 1990s that enterprises have been required to take responsibility for formal training. Provision of educational support for learners is not usually viewed as part of an enterprise's core business.

Much of the literature refers to the overall need for support rather than specifically identifying and evaluating particular types of support (for example, counselling, careers advice). However, there is extensive literature on the needs of specific types of learners (for example, women, isolated students) and support needs of specific learning contexts (for example, flexible delivery).

The literature consulted did not, in general, differentiate between specific learning or educational support, such as assistance with literacy, numeracy, computers or English language and other more general services and amenities for learners in VET such as child care, counselling, careers advice and so on. It was therefore necessary to consider them together for the purposes of this review.

This review considers the features of learner support, including definitions and characteristics of quality provision, the place of student support in TAFE, the role of support in workplaces, learner support needs in flexible delivery modes and the needs of specific learner groups.

Features of learner support

Definitions of learner and student support services

National research into the extent and effectiveness of TAFE student services was conducted in 1995 (ESSSC 1995c). The definition of student services proposed by that committee and the key functions of these support services are listed in the introduction to this report. That

definition has been accepted by subsequent literature (see for example ESSSC 1995b; Wapshere 1997).

Coombes makes the point that 'the NTCC-endorsed definition of Student Services identifies those functions that facilitate and contribute to students' study success and vocational outcomes' (1997, p.8) and recommends a change in the name from 'student services' to 'student educational services'. This change would accord with the views of those who advocate promoting the relevance and value of support services. Emphasising the link between educational programs and student services may also facilitate the integration of services and teaching (Coombes 1997).

These writers tend to use learner and student support interchangeably as they are describing services to students in formal learning institutions. In some cases, in particular reports on the TAFE sector, only the term 'student support' is used. This review uses both terms reflecting the greater role of TAFE institutions in providing this support. Research and analysis has not been applied extensively to the types of support which may be offered to learners in other settings.

The Student Services Committee report (1997a) is one study which focussed on supporting learners in the workplace. It took a broader definition of support services as services which enable learners to access, participate in and complete training. This study took the view that support facilitates learning which enables job performance and ultimately productivity. Thus the importance of integration of the support with training is further emphasised.

Benefits of learner support services

Research has identified that, without support services, attrition rates are likely to be considerable, especially amongst students with special needs (ESSSC 1995a). Special-needs groups utilise and value student services more than does the general student population (Heneker, Hampton & Gill 1996; Battye 1998). A major national survey on student services and amenities found that one in five of the general student population, and one in three of those with special needs stated that 'they may have dropped out of their courses without the help of student services' (ESSSC 1995, p.xiii).

The context for learning and support needs

The context of the learning is extremely important in determining the particular needs of the learner. Anderson (ESSSC 1995a) found that institution-based TAFE students valued employment services, information services and facilities the highest, ahead of health-related services, learning support services and counselling services.

For those learners who are already employed, their need for employment services is likely to be different. It is likely that these learners will not require detailed information about course entrance requirements; however, educational support will be crucial.

Learning in the workplace has been promoted to employers as increasing productivity. In fact it has been suggested that:

> *This view of training as an instrument for increasing productivity (rather than as a means of helping individuals to learn and grow) is likely to de-emphasise learner support unless employers can be shown that this support is economically viable.* (SSC 1997a, p.15)

Economic factors in learner support

There is a strong emphasis in the literature on the economic factors involved in providing learner support services. TAFE student services have traditionally assisted people in disadvantaged groups to access and participate in TAFE programs. However, the ANTA commissioned report, *The provision of student services to isolated students* (1995), points to the introduction of the competitive environment where providers are not required to include costly provision of student services as part of their training. In addition, this report is concerned that:

Many programs designed for and delivered in the workplace frequently give little or no consideration to the student support structures that need to accompany such programs.

(ANTA 1995, p.20)

Research by the Student Services Committee found that support for workplace learners reduces 'avoidance of training and withdrawal by learners, improving the job-related outcomes of learning activities and increasing employees' satisfaction levels' (1997a, p.64).

Characteristics of quality learner support services

In one recent report, Montague et al. (SSC 1998) 'used process benchmarking to identify best practice models in the provision of support for non-English-speaking background (NESB), mainstream students'. Their 'Keys to Success of a Learning Support Service' (pp.12–13), although directed towards NESB students in particular, are sufficiently general as to be applicable to others in need of learning support since they embody principles of adult learning in a high-quality environment. For example, they identified that the following (not the complete list) needed to be in place:

- an identified and acknowledged need within the institute for the learning support service
- a supportive political environment with ongoing funding
- the service being regarded as a valued part of the institute
- experienced, flexible learning support teachers with excellent communication and negotiation skills, whose expertise mainstream teachers ... acknowledge and respect
- a variety of learning support strategies to meet the varying needs of students, modules/courses offered and staff
- effective quality assurance processes
- a systematic way of monitoring outcomes and evaluating the services provided
- an effective strategy for marketing, promoting and advocating the need for the provision of learning support services and the actual services available

Some writers have been concerned about the integration of support services into program delivery. The report describing provisions of student services to isolated students cited above (ANTA 1995) provides a checklist for requirements of future models of student services to be integrated into program delivery.

Anderson (ESSSC 1995a) found that the greatest challenge facing providers of student services and amenities in TAFE was to identify and respond to the diverse range of client needs and priorities. He also suggested that State-based targets should be set to ensure service provision, particularly for special-needs groups. He proposed principles for provision of student services which included accessibility, confidentiality, efficiency, equity, flexibility, integration, participation, quality and responsiveness.

Place of learner support services in the TAFE sector

Until the 1980s, vocational education and training (VET) had been largely the preserve of the public sector (Anderson 1997). The Kangan report on TAFE in Australia (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974) identified the need to remove barriers to access, especially for adults, with special attention to women, migrants and people with a disability. It recommended that TAFE improve counselling and welfare services and provide preparation and bridging courses. This emphasis on access and equity continued through the 1980s with more extensive support services.

Within TAFE institutions this support has often been provided by specialist units by specialist staff (counsellors, specialist teachers) rather than being integrated into the activities of the classroom; that is, they have been an 'add-on' rather than an integral part of the student's learning support framework (SSC 1997a).

Initiatives including the National Training Reform Agenda and its successor the National Training Framework, and the National Competition Policy have moved education and training into the competitive market place. It was intended to establish user choice in an 'open training market' in which private registered training organisations (RTOs) and industry take on a larger role (Johnston 1994; Anderson 1998a). Consequently student support services have come under greater scrutiny to measure their success and apply the 'user pays' principle.

In order to retain funding and to claim a place as a core activity, student support services have to demonstrate their 'value-addedness', through 'adequate quantitative evidence' (Coombes 1997, p.3). As reported by Anderson (ESSSC 1995a) the contribution of student services to retention rates has been shown to be significant.

Thus, some proponents of student services in TAFE see a need to recast discussion about learner support in terms of competitive advantage (Battye 1998; Burrows 1998; Clilverd et al. 1998; Heneker, Hampton & Gill 1996). Proactive planning, marketing and the demonstration of effectiveness are advocated (Crestani 1998). It is suggested that there is a need for creative ways of promoting student services, and of demonstrating their value to improve their position in TAFE (Stewart 1998).

In order to demonstrate their efficacy and to ascertain their real cost, student services providers need to research and document their effectiveness as do other sectors of TAFE (Battye 1998). For example, informal learner support used to be provided by teachers but this input, although valued by students (Anderson 1997) was not quantified or budgeted for. Teaching loads have increased, reducing opportunities for informal support provision. This highlights the need to integrate student services with other TAFE functions if such support is not to disappear altogether (Clilverd et al. 1998). The recent increase in self-paced and distance delivery also raises the need for consideration of specialist student support.

Heneker, Hampton and Gill assert that those student support units which 'most successfully received recognition for their efforts were those which documented their achievements at least annually' (1996, p.38). The need to demonstrate outcomes has translated into considerable effort to evaluate and quantify support service delivery, to mitigate the lack of recognition of their value.

In a climate of cost reduction, there is pressure for TAFE to demonstrate productivity and to focus on outcomes and accountability (for example, Doratis 1998). Emphasis has been shifting since the mid-eighties 'in the focus ... of national VET policy from participation and equity to efficiency and effectiveness' (Anderson 1998b, p.21). This has affected funding for student services, which can be regarded as inessential adjuncts to the core business of training provision (Anderson 1994). TAFE institutes have faced the dilemma of satisfying an increasing demand for student services, because of higher participation rates, and a shrinking resources base (Haigh & Brunner 1990, Anderson 1999).

Perceptions of learner support provided by the TAFE sector

In 1995, research was conducted into community, industry and student perceptions of TAFE services (ESSSC 1995a, 1995b). No single client perspective could be isolated and State-by-State differences were noted. However, it was established by Anderson (ESSSC 1995a) that the three services most valued by students (nationally) are employment services, information services and facilities. These are followed in descending order of value to the student by health, medical and safety services, learning support services, student association services, then financial assistance services, followed by counselling services. All these services were rated as important by more than two-thirds of all respondents (ESSSC 1995a).

Satisfaction levels varied in the latter study. Information services, learning support services and counselling services were rated as good. Financial assistance, health medical and safety, student association, facilities, employment services were rated as poor. The last is of particular concern because it was also found to be the most highly desired service (ESSSC 1995a). This was also found in a State-based study, which recommends acknowledging the priorities of TAFE SA students by the establishment of a separate employment service (Coombes 1997).

In general, students considered that TAFE support services should be characterised by principles of accessibility, confidentiality, efficiency, equity, flexibility, integration, participation, quality and responsiveness (ESSSC 1995a). Industry valued accessibility, flexibility, superior practicality and immediate applicability to the workplace (ESSSC 1995b). Students' main problems with support provision were identified as rigid hours, poor staff and difficulty finding out about services (ESSSC 1995a).

Most TAFEs conduct student satisfaction surveys (for example Riverina Institute of TAFE 1998) and issue student service advice booklets (for example North Coast Institute of TAFE 1998). Some are utilising wider studies as benchmarks against which to compare their own services (for example Torrens Valley Institute 1998). Most of the information collected in this way remains in-house, and the benefits that could arise from collation have not been realised (Battye 1998). National surveys of vocational education graduates are conducted regularly (NCVER 1993, 1999). Since respondents are by definition those who had succeeded at their studies, they can give only part of the picture.

The 1999 student outcomes survey (NCVER 1999) did not ask course and module graduates about their satisfaction with student services specifically. They were asked to rate aspects of their course including access to library, student counselling, information about careers and jobs. Graduates in this survey were highly satisfied with access to library and learning services but less satisfied with student counselling.

Learning in the workplace and provision of support services

One study in the area of accredited workplace training and learner support is that conducted by Sakariassen et al. (SSC 1997a). This study is particularly significant because of the lack of research in this area, by comparison with the 'attention given to student support services within institutional settings' (p.15), as this literature review also attests. Of particular interest to this present research is the articulation of the differences in support needs for those training in workplaces from those training in non-workplace settings. Key differences concern learners' perceptions of the relative importance of the 'different elements of support ... for example, information about course entrance requirements may be relatively unimportant for employed trainees and apprentices, whereas educational support may be crucial' (p.14).

Another significant difference concerns the relationship between the givers and receivers of support, which 'changes when training is delivered in the workplace' (p.14). These roles can become more complex and possibly ambiguous, for example when 'the employer becomes a partner with the provider in the delivery of the training, and a partner with the learner in accessing student services from the provider' (p.15).

Sakariassen et al. (SCC 1997a) consider the barriers and obstacles to providing effective support in workplaces. They raise some issues which need to be considered at both macro and micro levels, if organisations are to increase their capacity to provide that support. Some of those issues are that:

- Most vocational education and training legislation pays little attention to support.
- Initial development of workplace trainers neglects support issues and skills.
- Many managers and supervisors may lack support skills (themselves) and the opportunity to acquire them.
- There is little professional development specifically aimed at support (p.46).

However, despite these barriers, the authors also provide practical guidelines for developing and delivering learner support services. From these guidelines, based on case studies, they have constructed a model for providing that support.

They suggest that in workplaces, actions need to occur at three levels within an organisation:

- *Actions at the organisation's enterprise level, to create an environment which values learning and learners, together with a support infrastructure.*
- *Actions at the individual's work area level, to provide the practical support to enable him/her to access, undertake and complete training. These actions involve the learner, his/her immediate supervisor, peers, trainers and other support workers.*
- *Actions at either work area or enterprise level to bring in services available from specialist providers outside the organisation.* (SSC 1997a, p.47)

They also confirm the value of informal support in workplace learning, by stating that they consider the most critical aspect in ensuring effective learner support 'appears to be the extent to which the immediate supervisor and/or peers ... take an informed interest in the learner and his/her learning activities ... This remains the challenge in most organisations' (p.52). Other writers too, have noted a growing emphasis on mentoring, which represents an attempt to tap into informal learning opportunities already present in many workplaces to the benefit of both the workplace and the worker (Balatti, Edwards & Andrew 1997; Gayle 1993).

The place of the mentor in workplace learning

It has been suggested that a better term than 'mentor' would be 'workplace learning guide' (Simons, Harris & Bone 1999). Their rationale for using this term is that 'while notions of "trainer" might be construed as concentrating too heavily on job task learning, notions of "mentor" tend to focus almost exclusively on career and personal development. In any case, both notions reflect processes that are often characterised as rather formal and structured' (p.8). These researchers have attempted to identify a complex set of behaviours that are in fact about learner support, where the 'mentor' or 'guide' may also be your peer, or your team leader, or at times, your trainer. In relation to the latter role, Simons, Harris & Bone identify a range of behaviours of 'workplace trainers' that were not only about formal training processes (for example, training, delivering and reviewing the training) but were also indicative of 'ways of working that seemed reflective of approaches which placed learning and work alongside each other and where formalised approaches to learning co-existed with informal and incidental learning' (p.5).

Sakariassen et al. (SSC 1997a) identified these skills and behaviours as 'advanced and specialist' and suggested that from their research, they had observed that there was 'some resistance by both trainers and workplace supervisors to gaining advanced specialist skills, such as counselling or mentoring' (p.46).

Bond's recent research on mentoring and mentoring relationships focusses initially on workplace mentoring programs, 'introduced as a strategy to address imbalances in the workforce or to overcome learning difficulties, and generally have proven to be a cost-effective method of skills development' (Bond 1999, p.8). His case examples have been included as instances where 'mentoring practice has been used for practical benefit in structured learning environments in both the corporate and the education [particularly tertiary] sectors' (p.17) He states that at this stage in Australia, 'mentoring is more a faith than a science, initiated by those whose values orient them towards the development of the whole person. This view is somewhat at odds with the prevailing view in the VET sector—that education and training are about developing competence in specific skills, as required by industry' (p.17). Although his case examples include a number from the VET (TAFE) sector, it would seem that formal mentoring programs are relatively rare in institutional VET settings.

Bond refers to a 'mentoring environment' (p.40); that is, the right social and educational conditions need to be in place before any more formal mentoring programs will succeed. His suggestions are relevant, with modifications for context, to both institutional and workplace environments. He suggests, for example:

- *Make sure students are aware of support services—students often withdraw without seeking assistance.*
- *Be sensitive to the feelings of new students; create a culture of 'talking'.*
- *Provide situations which encourage active student participation.*
- *Promote a meaningful integration of learning experiences.*
- *Motivate students to improve their own performance—create a love of learning and the strength of purpose to pursue it in depth and with intensity.*
- *Celebrate achievement [before a wider audience] to give encouragement and recognition.*
- *Make sure the operating ethos of your organisation provides the right method to students.*

(Bond 1999, p.40)

Bond defines these as comprising a 'mentoring environment'. However, they could equally be viewed as being aspects of a 'learning organisation', applicable whether that organisation is a VET institution or a workplace.

Several writers recommended further research into workplace learning, particularly into informal learning and support (Hagar 1997; SSC 1997a). This recommendation was taken up with some enthusiasm. Projects have been completed on factors affecting learning in the workplace (Harford 1997) and learning in the workplaces of the future (Owen 1999). It seems that learner support in workplace learning is currently attracting a surge of research interest.

Learner support needs arising from flexible learning modes

Practitioners (for example, International Conference on Open Learning 1994; Coventry & Higginson 1996; Clilverd 1997) have discussed the support needs generated by 'non-traditional' ways of learning (that is, learning that is not focussed on a teacher in front of a class). Distance and self-paced learning, on-line learning and other modes of flexible delivery, place greater reliance on the capacities of individual students. Despite the high profile that flexible delivery has received during this decade, particularly by policy-makers, and the enthusiasm with which it has been regarded, a recent study showed that 'over 70% of Australian VET learners lack the dispositional and skill readiness for flexible delivery. They lack the learning capabilities at present to be part of [a] learning society' (Warner, Christie & Choy 1998, p.4).

Findings of the latter research project have implications for students themselves, for learner support systems and practitioners (including teachers), for workplaces and employers and for policy development. Increasingly, apprentices, trainees and others learning in the workplace are enrolled in formal training by distance or flexible mode. Their support needs must be addressed by both their enterprise and the VET institution.

In relation to students and their support needs, Warner, Christie and Choy suggested:

- *There is a need to address the skill deficiencies which students have and which are a barrier to success, including:*
  - *technological skills*
  - *literacy and numeracy skills*
  - *meta-cognitive and problem-solving skills*
  - *independent learning skills.*
- *There is a need to examine VET clients' general attitudes and orientation towards learning. The present culture is still teacher-dependent and does not value alternative learning methods. What this implies is a need to change dispositional readiness. This can be done through encouraging effective teaching/learning processes which focus upon developing self-confidence and success among students.*
- *There is a need for pre-course student screening to ensure that they have the skills necessary to succeed in their chosen courses. This is especially so in courses which are delivered flexibly. Screening should address both the skill and the dispositional abilities of students.*

- *Course providers also need to provide remediation for students who are deficient in any of the skills they need to succeed in their chosen course. These remediation courses will normally include technological readiness and skills training but will also include basic literacy and numeracy remediation.*
- *There is a need for greater teaming between delivery and learning support staff in helping clients develop many of the skills [noted above].* (Warner, Christie & Choy 1998, pp.10–11, 50)

There is more literature available on the impact of new technologies on learning and delivery, but less dealing with the support needs of the students involved. Proceedings of the first International Conference on Open Learning were dominated by technical papers, which heavily outweighed any discussion of learner support needs (International Conference on Open Learning 1994). This was foreshadowed in the entirely technical focus of the 7th Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education. (Bishop & Baker 1989).

One project that does acknowledge the difficulties some students face with online learning is by Cramond (1998). It found that many RTOs are combining online technologies with more traditional delivery methodologies in order to meet student preference for traditional approaches. It also found that students who were not used to self-directed study needed extra support to get started.

There are a host of systemic and local issues facing RTOs in relation to online delivery, including those related to support services, for example, how to provide the best and most efficient:

- course and subject information
- online enrolment and payment of fees
- course materials
- learning support both in general terms and course specific
- technological support
- employment services

The survey respondents to the Cramond research were asked to provide examples of strategies used to provide the most effective service in pre-enrolment, communicating with learners, course delivery, assessment, catering for varying learner needs, and learner support services. Suggestions for how to provide learner support services were few but included using email, telephone and face-to-face contact with support provided by teachers, librarians and peer groups (p.3).

There are local attempts by providers to inform students on how to get the best from the new methods with the development of students' guides (Ashcroft 1999). Further research is also being conducted into the improvement of such learner guides (Connolly in progress).

On a State-wide level, instructional manuals were published during 1998 by the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), as guides for staff to flexible delivery strategies, including orientation and support for students. One module, entitled *Learning support services: A change management module*, contains as outcomes that staff should be able to:

- *identify the types of support available to learners*
- *explain the role of support services in a flexible learning environment*
- *identify ways support services can collaborate in the development and implementation of flexible learning environments.* (DET 1998, p.1)

Outcomes of a recent research report by Van Staveren, Beverley and Bloch (1999), on the role of student support services in flexibly run courses in the Northern and Western Sydney Institutes of TAFE, corroborated the findings of Warner, Christie and Choy, 1998. It found that there was a need for support and other staff to develop specific strategies to enable students to be better prepared before and during their flexible learning module/s. It recommended that RTOs should:

- *ensure information on course delivery modes is adequate and widely available. This includes teaching sections with apprentices and trainees ... ensuring that employers of these students understand ...the implications [of the course delivery mode] for their trainee.*
- *provide sufficient information for students to assess their own readiness for learning*
- *provide new students with a comprehensive orientation to flexible learning*
- *provide full information to students and teachers on the full range of student support services*
- *provide coordinated learning support to assist students to become more independent learners.*

(Van Staveren, Beverley & Bloch 1999, p.2)

This research also revealed that:

> *What appeared to be significant factors in students' satisfaction with flexible delivery as a mode of learning, were their age, gender and previous qualifications. Consistently, the data showed that male students, younger students and those with only year 10 or less education, reported more difficulties and less satisfaction both with their course and with the support services when they accessed them.*
>
> (Van Staveren, Beverley & Bloch 1999, p.1)

In other words, the 'customising' of particular support services for specific learner groups is something that may need to be considered more closely by the providers of those services.

Support for special needs groups of learners

The project brief does not specify a focus on the support needs of specific groups in VET. However, as these are the areas most commonly researched, they seems worthy of brief mention in this review.

Investigation of the needs of Aboriginal learners in VET has found a culturally supportive learning environment to be critical to the achievement of successful outcomes (SSC 1997c). Findings showed the need to adjust performance indicators to the local setting, and suggested a framework against which localised benchmarking could be developed. Earlier research also recommended the use of local expertise, especially women, to encourage participation and completion by indigenous people (Demski 1992). Further research into best practice for the delivery of VET to rural and remote Aboriginal communities is currently being undertaken (ANTARAC 1998).

Cultural diversity is increasingly recognised as a challenge to industry trainers as well, with low representation and retention rates amongst non-English-speaking background learners (ATEC 1996). An investigation into industry practice in managing a diverse workforce found considerable variation in standards, with the average at a low level (ATEC 1997a). A subsequent publication set out a good practice model for use by industry (ATEC 1997b). Best practice models in TAFE for NESB have been identified, and it is considered that support services are a valuable and valued service for this group (SSC 1998).

Learners with disabilities have been the subject of some attention. In recognition of the legal requirements of their position, the Education and Student Services Standing Committee of the National TAFE Chief Executives Committee commissioned a study to investigate the ways in which the *Disability discrimination act* 1992 impacted on TAFE systems. It recommended the dissemination of the information it had gathered to all TAFE staff and students, the involvement in planning of people with a disability, and the widespread use of the training kit, *ResponseAbility* (SSC 1996a). *ResponseAbility* has subsequently been both widely disseminated and utilised by service staff (SSC 1997c).

However, low participation rates of disabled learners in tertiary education and the paucity of research into their needs has been noted. Physical, attitudinal, financial and learning barriers to the participation of people with disabilities in VET have been identified. It is suggested that open learning and flexible delivery have considerable potential to improve access to education and training for students with a disability (Kearns 1998).

Specific institutions are conducting their own research into particular need areas. Several were the subject of presentations to a student support conference, held in 1998. It is apparent that information is disseminated in this way in the absence of more general publication and dissemination for the benefit of service providers (see for example, Hogg 1998; Karp 1998; Trevan & Chladek 1998; Kleinig 1998).

The subgroup of students suffering psychiatric illness has been the subject of two unpublished studies conducted for service providers by TAFE NSW (TAFE NSW Counselling Services 1995). These looked at the implications of learner support on attrition rates for this group, finding that, with sufficient support, completion rates are bolstered (Bonser & Barbour 1995). This research remains in-house, and may be typical of that conducted and utilised by practitioners, but not disseminated to a wider audience.

Notable for its lack of particular attention is youth, with only one study (unpublished) that specifically looked at the support needs of unemployed young people (Meerman, Petersen & Powell 1995) It found that given appropriate support, young people, even those at considerable educational disadvantage, can succeed in VET. It also found very low awareness of student services, especially of the role counsellors could play in career planning (Coombes 1997). This also supports the findings of Van Staveren, Beverly & Bloch (1999), that young people undertaking flexible delivery learning in VET have support needs that may need to be catered for using different strategies.

An ANTA report (1996) identified that Indigenous people, people with a disability, people from NESB, women, remote and rural learners have poor training and qualification outcomes. The report suggested that at this point, 'implementation of strategies is necessary, rather than more research and more reports' (ANTA 1996, p.2). Accordingly, it set out strategies and desired outcomes to be achieved by the year 2001.

This ANTA document recognised that 'perhaps the most important issue for people currently under-represented in vocational education and training or not attaining equitable outcomes from the system, is that of student or employee support' (p.14).

It also acknowledged that:

- *The high cost of individual support has meant that it tends to be primarily available within the public sector, where there is a legislative requirement for the equitable provision of training and work opportunities.*
- *The opening up of the training market and shift away from training in institutions to enterprise-based training and flexible delivery, may create added challenges in terms of equity of outcomes.*

(ANTA 1996, p.15)

The report suggests one strategy to be the identification of 'best practice in provision and co-ordination of service delivery and develop "How to" materials for sharing with public, private and community providers, group training companies and industry' (p.15). ANTA has recognised the continuing need for support services to be targetted to the diversity of VET learners, as well as the need to identify and promote best practice in these services, beyond the TAFE systems.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to identify guidelines, good practice, strategies and resources in the provision of learning and other support services for learners in public and private VET institutions and in the workplace. It noted that there was virtually no literature documenting services in private VET providers. It also commented on the relatively small amount of data on structured VET learning in places of employment. Both these situations are likely to change in the next few years with an increase both in the amount of provision by private providers and the involvement of industry in training their employees/trainees.

However, within the public VET sector, there was considerable literature that identified guidelines, strategies and good practice for supporting students in general and for those identified as having particular support needs.

Findings and discussion

This study examined one group training company, four VET institutions and eight enterprises known to be committed to training and to the provision of learner support. In order to highlight the successful strategies these organisations have put in place, a case study approach was adopted. While some examples of effective learner support have been identified from these case studies, they cannot be said to be representative of the training and learner support available in enterprises and VET public and private institutions throughout Australia.

The findings from the case studies are discussed under the various research questions posed in the project proposal. They are also compared with the findings and model for providing support outlined in *Supporting workplace learners* (SSC 1997a) as discussed in the literature review.

Types of learner support

This study did not attempt to investigate all types of learner support or student services. It examined the support of learning provided for people who had embarked upon their learning within VET institutions or in workplaces. As noted earlier in this report, it did not consider support provided prior to commencement of study (for example, help to select a course or selection of students into courses). The focus was on learning support, rather than on the wide range of support services required to assist people to carry out study (for example, childcare, transport), although if respondents mentioned these support needs during the interviews they were discussed. It did not focus deliberately on groups who are traditionally considered to need support (for example, Indigenous people, women); rather, it focussed on cohorts of the students and employees currently undertaking training at the VET institutions and enterprises involved in the study.

A wide range of support was found across the VET institutions and enterprises involved in the study. These varied from formal support provided by discrete support services to informal support provided by work mates and fellow students. The study found that support provided both across and within organisations fell into a continuum from formal to informal, rather than into discrete categories. The following list includes examples of the support provided by the VET institutions and enterprises involved in this study, arranged in a continuum from the most to the least formal. Not all examples of support were found in all institutions and enterprises.

Table 1: Types of learner support identified in case studies

Learner support provided by the VET institutions included:	Learner support provided by the enterprises included:	
Counselling by trained internal or external counsellors	Counselling by trained external counsellors	**Formal support**
Literacy, numeracy and English as a second language tutoring by trained teachers	Literacy tutoring by trained external teachers	
Mentoring by teachers in an official mentoring program	Mentoring by trained mentors in an official mentoring program	
Employment services		
Library services		
Resources available for learners to use to practise, improve skills, catch up on material missed, additional information etc	Resources available for learners to use to practise, improve skills, catch-up on material missed, additional information, etc	
Work experience or field work		
	Incentive scheme to encourage people to undertake training and maintain their motivation	
	Learners provided with the costs of attending external courses	
Interpreter services for learners with sight and hearing difficulties	Interpreter services provided by for people with English language difficulties by work mates from similar ethnic background	
People with specific problems given assistance to access external specialist services	People with specific problems given assistance (e.g. time off work) to access external specialist services	
Peer mentoring as a part of an official program, but without specific training	Peer mentoring as a part of an official program, but without specific training of mentors	
Support of self-paced programs provided by each teaching area	Support of self-paced programs provided by visiting TAFE teachers	
Learners regularly interviewed on their progress by a person with this designated responsibility		
Provision of specific learning aids to assist learners with disabilities		
	Instruction of new employees in their job by an assigned 'buddy'	
	Encouragement through participation in competitions	
Informal counselling by teachers	Informal counselling by supervisors, senior workers, Human Resources Manager, etc.	
Assistance with the content of programs provided by teachers outside classes	Assistance with the content of programs provided by teachers outside classes	
	Supervisors, owners, managers, training co-ordinator monitor progress, provide feedback, ask learners about their progress and need for assistance	
	Learners ask work mates for information about their work, to complete assessment tasks	
	Tradespeople use apprentices' questions as 'learning exercises'	**Informal support**

Differences in the way VET institutions and enterprises provide learner support

Many differences were identified in the learning support provided by the enterprises and VET institutions—public and private—involved in this study. Most of the differences stem from the fact that teaching is the core business of VET institutions but is not for enterprises. The enterprises involved in this study have developed training and support strategies that coexist with and add value to their core business. The major differences are summarised in the table below.

Table 2: Differences in learner support offered by VET institutions and enterprises

Characteristics of VET institution learner support	Characteristics of enterprise learner support
A much clearer distinction between 'teaching' and 'support'	Support for learners cannot be separated from employee support
A clear distinction between learners and teachers; teaching and learner support (e.g. counsellors, literacy & numeracy teachers etc) are recognised occupations	Trainers and learners are almost indistinguishable as most workplace trainers are also learners; training and learner support are not specialist roles—everyone can (and does) become involved; trainers at some institutions have had specific training
Greater emphasis on discrete support services (e.g. counsellor, literacy teacher)	Fewer distinctions between trainers and providers of support and between training and support; most learner support is integrated with training delivery
VET institutions expect students to be sufficiently motivated to complete their study (as long as the quality of teaching, equipment, facilities, etc are appropriate)	Emphasis on providing incentives for employees successfully undertaking training (e.g. wage increase, payment of tuition fees)
Students expect VET institutions to provide courses, facilities, equipment and support—that is considered their function	Employees express considerable gratitude to the company for giving them the opportunity and support to study and learn
For many VET institutions, the numbers of students enrolled make it very difficult for them to provide a really personal support service	Support is very personal, especially in small companies where the owner or human resource manager knows the staff and their strengths and weaknesses very well
Although one VET institutions was involved in self-paced learning, this is not the commonly used mode in VET institutions	Much training in workplaces is self-paced (with additional tutorials, training, assessment and support being provided) because it coexists readily with work commitments
Many VET students emphasise that institutions should provide the support they require, that is perceived as the function of VET institutions	Both trainers and learners emphasise that it's the learner's responsibility to ask for help when they need it
Training and learner support is core business	Training and learning support is regarded by employers as 'investment in their people' which is repaid by employee loyalty
For most students learning and support is not integrated into work; many courses and teachers work at bridging the gap (e.g. the Practice Firm at Torrens Valley, apprenticeship training and work experience of field work forms a part of many courses)	Much training and learning support is part of everyday workplace activities and is integrated with work, e.g. new employees learn how to do their jobs, use new equipment, make new products and provide new services
Learning is mostly an individual activity, even though VET institutions put varying amounts of stress on group work	Training and learning is provided within a team environment; the trainer is often a team member and learners look for and receive support from team members. It is expected that learning is shared with the team

Similarities in the way VET institutions and enterprises provide learner support

Similarities were found between the support mechanisms and strategies developed by VET institutions and enterprises where training is conducted. The most significant similarity is a desire to establish an environment which supports and encourages learners. How this environment had been developed varied to suit the culture and needs of each organisation. It often depended on the work and influence of one or two key individuals, frequently written into policies developed by the organisation, and most importantly, the value placed on either students or employees. The list of key indicators of successful support was developed by the participating organisations and applies to both VET institutions and enterprises.

Therefore, although there were differences between the support structures and strategies established by the VET institutions and enterprises (reflecting the different focus of the two types of organisations), the overall goal of support provision was the same—to provide a supportive learning environment that encouraged and motivated students and employees to learn and achieve success.

Provision of formal and informal learner support

A commonly reported difference between VET institutions and enterprises is that the former provides formal learner support using specialist dedicated resources (for example, by counsellors, student services, the library, literacy and numeracy teachers, ESL and so on), while in enterprises learner support is generally provided more informally (for example, by team mates, supervisors).

Not surprisingly, the findings confirmed this difference. However, the distinction between the type of support available in the two types of organisations is not clear-cut. A number of enterprises established formal support arrangements. Southcorp arranged (and paid) for an external counsellor and literacy teacher to visit the site on a weekly basis. Maxitrans developed a formal mentoring program for trainees, with formal training of the mentors. Email and Maxitrans established training centres in their factories. Movieworld and Southcorp have formal incentive schemes in place. Maxitrans works in partnership with the School of Mining, Ballarat, with teachers visiting the site weekly to work with learners. At the same time, a considerable amount of informal support is provided by teachers in the VET institutions. For example, many teachers at all three VET institutions considered the provision of learner support a significant (or in some cases primary) part of their role.

This project, like the *Supporting workplace learners* project, found a blurring between training and support activities in enterprises, as much learning is undertaken informally. The findings of this study corroborate the *Supporting workplace learners* project conclusion, that:

> *In this model the support services are not seen as add-ons but as part of the learning mechanism.*
> (SSC 1997a, p.38)

Interestingly, this statement also applies to the provision of training and support in the three program areas involved in this study at Tea Tree Gully Campus of Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE.

The value of informal support, particularly peer mentoring, is mentioned by Balatti, Edwards and Andrew (1997) and Gayle (1993). Peer mentoring was widely found in enterprises and in one VET institution studied (and is being considered in another). Mentoring of trainees at Maxitrans was more formal than elsewhere, with mentors receiving specific training and being required to regularly formally evaluate the progress of their trainees.

In all of the manufacturing organisations (including Maxitrans) a far more informal 'buddy' mentoring arrangement was used for training new employees. The system works well and fits into the team structures in use in all these organisations.

In summary, it can be said that the mix of informal and formal support in the VET institutions and enterprises studied is different—in enterprises, most learner support was found to be informal and in VET institutions there tends to be more formal than informal support.

Impact of the different working environments in VET institutions and enterprises on the provision of learner support

The different environment in enterprises and VET institutions means that the support mechanisms provided must also be different. The overall needs of the learners are similar—gaining the support they need when they need it—but the strategies used have to meet organisational and individual learner needs. In enterprises, training and learning support has to fit in with production and service provision requirements, policies and routines (for example, rotation of employees through the lines, weekly working patterns, workplace meetings). The provision of training and learner support also has to have regard for the full range of employee-learners' needs (for example, to earn money, be accepted by work mates, to gain promotion, to have an interesting job). As a result, the provision of successful training and learner support in an enterprise can be complex and can involve juggling a large number of competing priorities and demands. In VET institutions the situation is entirely different: the provision of training and learner support is their *raison d'etre*. However, there are also competing priorities and demands that have to be considered in planning the provision of learner support, especially for public institutions increasingly faced by shrinking budgets while being asked to do more with less.

Interestingly, at the participant workshop it was their common problems and solutions and issues that was the theme of the day rather than their differences. They acknowledged their differences, but they stressed that they were all working to achieve very similar goals.

Variations between enterprises and VET institutions in the provision of learner support

The study looked at a wide range of enterprises—small and large, manufacturing and service, across four States and a Territory. The four VET institutions are of a similar size but one is a private provider, and of the two TAFE institutions, one is a traditional general purpose institute while the other is a campus specialising in self-paced delivery.

This study found a considerable variation between all of the organisations in how they provide learner support. Small organisations obviously have particular problems and advantages—strong team structure, close relations between the owner and staff and difficulty allocating time to assist learners. Expanding organisations (for example, Maxitrans) have different problems and advantages from those which are stable (for example, the Harrison Group, Southcorp)—rapid increase in staff numbers, high demand for initial training, difficulty maintaining standards, and a demanding role for supervisors.

The wide variation in learning support mechanisms in place, to some extent reflect these differences. The manufacturing enterprises, for example have all integrated their training and support systems into their ISO 9000 quality management systems. For these companies, base training in the standard operating procedures (SOPs)was provided by team members. The service companies were involved in a wide range of training (Movieworld) and thorough apprenticeship training (the two hair and beauty salons).

On the whole, each organisation (VET or enterprise) has developed its own specialised approach to delivering training and providing support that reflects its history, management, structure, size, key personalities, people and financial situation.

Despite these differences most of the key indicators of successful provision of learner support developed by the project applied to all the organisations involved.

The level of support provided by the private and public VET institutions was very similar. Martin College provides an impressive array of support for their students. The college is able to provide a very personal level of support, despite the fact that it is a large institution. As well, Martin College rigorously evaluates course delivery, which includes support provision by implication, in an effort to continuously improve services for learners.

Value of learner support

Almost without exception, learners interviewed considered that the support they had received contributed considerably to the success of their training. All of the case studies include a selection of the comments made by employees and students about the learning support they had received. Some employees were effusive about the support they had received, largely because it had been unexpected and not available at other organisations where they had worked. Students at the four VET institutions also clearly expressed the value of the support they had received.

Enterprises

The identification of support needs in enterprises mainly occurred through observation by supervisors, trainers, work mates, the training co-ordinator or by learners asking for assistance. Most learners interviewed considered it their responsibility to take the initiative and volunteer for training and seek help when needed. The learners in this project were far more likely to seek assistance than the learners involved in the *Supporting workplace learners* project. The different findings may simply be due to the specific enterprises involved in each project. They may also relate to the inclusion of a much wider range of training in this project (accredited apprenticeship, traineeship, certificate, diploma and non-accredited short courses, training new employees) than in the *Supporting workplace learners* project.

Learners in enterprises stressed the importance of the overall work environment to the success of their training, and their satisfaction as employees. For many organisations this was a team culture that had been inculcated. This had not happened by accident, but was the result of *policy* (for example, provision of on-site training for groups of people at Maxitrans), *structure* (for example, regular Toolbox meetings at Maxitrans), *key people* (for example, the training co-ordinators at Southcorp and Email and the Human Resource Manager at the Harrison Group), and *activities* (for example, the team building day at Corrective Services, the orienteering activities of Stuuts' employees in the Blue Mountains).

All of the enterprises involved had developed a supportive learning environment, one which encouraged employees to undertake training. Many employees said that they would not have undertaken training without it. Two organisations (Maxitrans and Southcorp) recognised that most of their people did not have formal qualifications, so concentrated on providing accredited training that led to formal qualifications. It was a tremendous 'buzz' for these people to gain their first formal qualifications after negative school experiences and many years believing that they were incapable of achieving very much at all. These two enterprises had realised the impact formal qualifications would have for their people and had structured their training accordingly—an excellent illustration of how they value their employees.

VET institutions

Teachers at all four VET institutions claimed that they felt increased retention rates and completion rates were the direct result of the provision of appropriate support to learners. However, none of these institutions has statistics to support these assertions, and conclusive statistics would be difficult to collect.

Providers of support services at both Canberra Institute of Technology and Torrens Valley mentioned the effects of reduced budgets on the provision of services to students. Both institutions felt that there was a constant need to justify the provision of support, as discussed by Doratis (1998), Anderson (1994) and Haigh and Brunner (1990). This present study

provides many anecdotal accounts from students on the value of learner support, reinforcing Anderson's (ESSC 1995a) research on the contribution of learner support to retention and success rates. This study also highlights the value employees placed on the provision of learner support and the perceived role it had in their success. However, it must be noted that this study selected organisations known to provide good learner support.

Each of the VET institutions studied have invested considerable resources into the provision of good-quality learner support services. Each clearly regard their services as a part of their 'competitive advantage' in the open training market. CIT and Torrens are collecting quantitative data on the impact of their services; that is, the number of students who received learner support and completed their modules or programs. However, this information was not available at the time of study.

Potential impact of the use of group training companies on the availability of learner support—one company's experience

One group training company, Macarthur Group Training (MGT) Limited, participated in the research. Macarthur Group Training Limited operates in the Macarthur area of NSW, in and around Campbelltown in South Western Sydney and provides training through its own registered training organisation, Macarthur Retail and Business Training Services other registered training organisations. It also organises and monitors apprenticeships and traineeships.

Although all group training companies have some features in common, the findings for Macarthur Group Training Limited cannot necessarily be generalised to others.

Macarthur Group Training Limited provides support to both learners and their host employers and a major advantage of their involvement in the relationship is as a third party resource for both host employers and learners. The company monitors the progress of trainees and apprentices both with their host employers and off-job training providers in order to prevent and manage problems.

The types of support which MTG is instrumental in providing to trainees, apprentices and host employers, and which might not otherwise be available to them, include:

- reimbursement to trainees of the TAFE administration fee of $160 per student and supply of the module books required
- access to and organisation of funds and assistance for learners with disabilities through the relevant government bodies
- pre-employment testing to diagnose literacy and numeracy needs and ensure additional support is given to learners in need of it
- regular monitoring of progress in courses and the relationship between trainees and apprentices and their host employers
- a 24-hour message service, answering service and mobile phones to handle problems which may arise
- counselling trainees and apprentices on issues like poor performance, absenteeism or lack of motivation
- mediating in cases of difficulties between the apprentice/trainee and their host employer to help ensure the relationship endures
- employment assistance for trainees in finding a second host employer if the first employer decides not to continue with the traineeship
- orientation and induction to relevant occupational health and safety rules and practices

Group training companies are well positioned to be able to offer valuable support to learners.

How integrated on- and-off-the-job training provides support for learning

The majority of learners involved in this study experienced integrated on- and off-the-job learning to some extent. This varied from highly formal arrangements such as apprenticeships and traineeships through to the less formal types of work experience built into most courses offered by VET institutions. Without exception, all participants believed there were advantages in integrating on- and off-the-job learning for learners and for employers. The advantages apply to both the support for learners and the learning itself.

A potential problem raised for this type of integration is the possibility that learners may be distracted from learning by competing workplace demands.

The attitude of apprentices and trainees to this is probably best summed up by a trainee employed by Macarthur Group Training Limited who commented: 'It is much better than just going to TAFE full-time where we wouldn't get paid or get the work experience, just the certificate'.

The following benefits accrue from the integration of on- and off-the-job training:

- providing full-time students with the work experience so essential to obtaining a job at the end of a VET institution course of training
- enabling a broader learning experience in terms of the range of trainers, environments, equipment, contexts and broad-based skills, whether an employee or a full-time student
- increasing exposure of learners to a wider range of potential support people in the workplace, among human resources/training staff, VET institution teachers, counsellors and so on
- providing the opportunity for learners to put theory into practice
- giving employees an opportunity to step back from the workplace and reflect on practice while in training and supported by peers/trainers
- giving employees an opportunity to develop skills as trainers in assisting other learners
- facilitating transfer of classroom learning to workplace applications
- encouraging broader team building where employees from different sections of a workplace come together for off-the-job training
- providing the opportunity for enterprise and VET institution trainers and teachers to share ideas, knowledge and skills, and collaborate in supporting learning.

Where learners are engaged in formal training, whether through a VET institution or enterprise, integrating the learning and support will be beneficial. Support from teachers and other learners or from employers, supervisors and peers can provide a rich and comprehensive, integrated and total learning experience.

Learners participating in the research were asked if they had experienced problems in integrating learning with work and, with few exceptions, found this was not difficult. Many of the participant workplaces (the Totalcare case study is one example) provide opportunities, materials and other forms of practical assistance during working hours; for example, coaching for learners completing training assignments or homework set by VET institutions.

In order for enterprises to provide support to learners, effective communication channels must be established so the VET institution can make learning expectations clear. The use of training logbooks, information sessions and regular workplace visits by teachers can assist this process.

Comparing research findings with the model for providing support from the *Supporting workplace learners* project, ANTA

The *Supporting workplace learners* project (SSC 1997a) developed guidelines for constructing and delivering learning support services in workplaces under the following headings:

- enterprise-level actions
- work area-level support
- external support

As one of the very few studies in this area, it is instructive to compare the findings with the outcomes of this study.

Similarities with the model

The allocation of different guidelines for each of the three levels identified in the model and the degree of specificity they contain, makes it difficult to match them individually with the key indicators developed by this project. However, there are strong parallels between the guidelines and the key indicators, many of which have implications across the three levels. As the key indicators apply to both enterprises and VET institutions, they are more conceptual and much less specific than the *Supporting workplace learners* guidelines.

There are marked similarities between the model for providing workplace support shown in figure 1 and the list of key indicators. Some aspects of the model are not found in the key indicators but are demonstrated in the case studies. In some instances, issues described in the model are embedded in the key indicators. (For example, human resources has not been singled out because this is often not a separate function in small organisations, it is included in the indicator—*The right individuals in key positions*.)

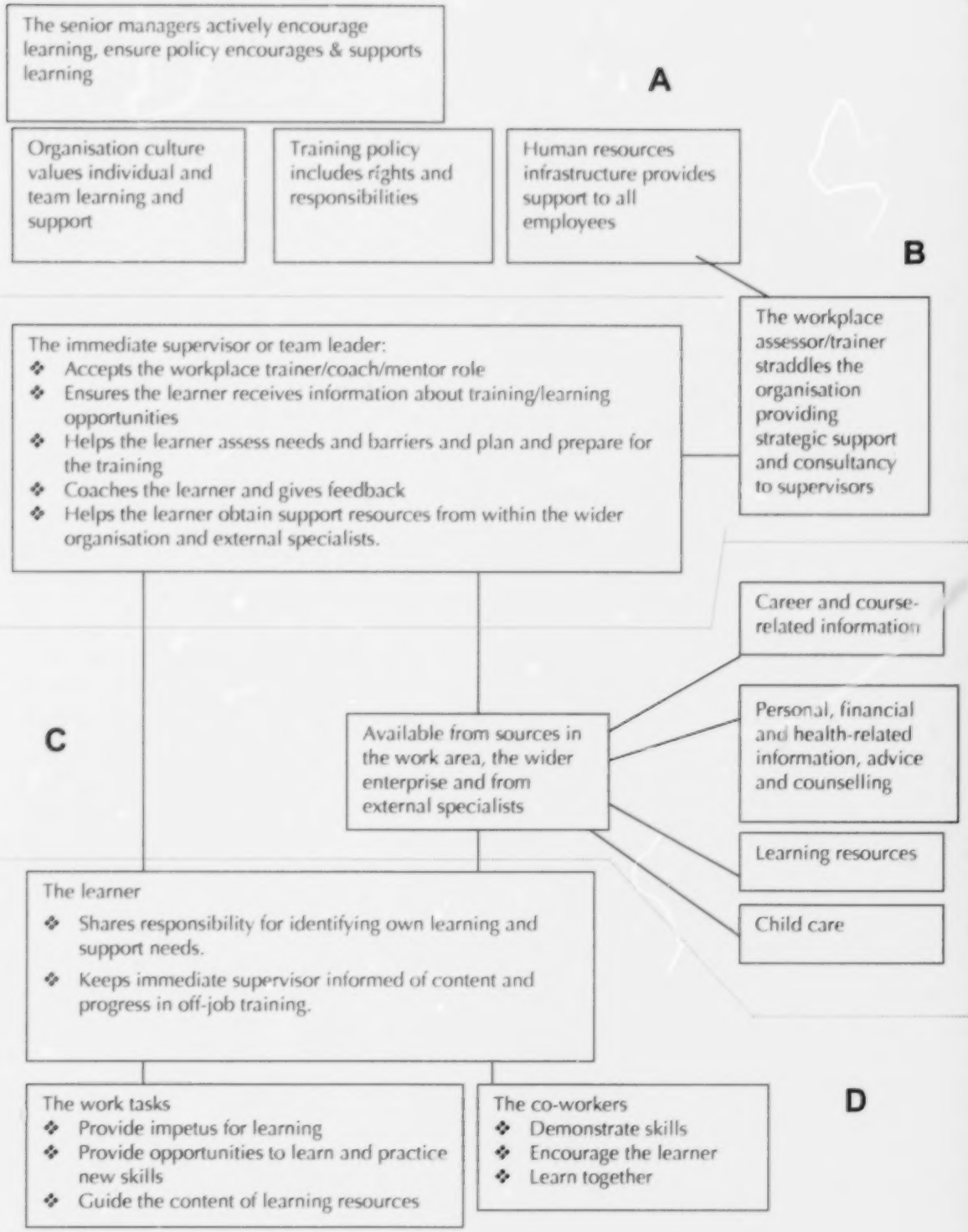
Most aspects of section A of the model are picked up by the key indicators.

Differences from the model

This study did not find that workplace assessors/trainers played a major consultancy role in most of the organisations researched (section B of the model). Southcorp is developing a team of assessors/trainers who will take a similar role in the future. Maxitrans had developed a rather different position, technical officer, to look after technical aspects of training, procedure writing, trouble shooting etc. but there were no plans for this person to undertake workplace trainer/assessor training. The small organisations did not see a need for this type of position.

This research found that most supervisors did very little training with the possible exception of Warner Brothers Movieworld—in contrast to section B of the model. In all of the organisations, supervisors (or team leaders, line co-ordinators) were too busy to be involved in much actual training. Most of these organisations demonstrated the trend of flat management structures with very small numbers of middle managers. As a result, middle-level managers (which included supervisors) were very busy, multiskilled people, constantly turning their hand to a wide range of activities and meeting a wide range of demands. Most supervisors were responsible for large numbers of people and complex operations, in some cases more than one production line.

Figure 1: Model for providing (workplace) support


The senior managers actively encourage learning, ensure policy encourages & supports learning
A
Organisation culture values individual and team learning and support
Training policy includes rights and responsibilities
Human resources infrastructure provides support to all employees
B
The workplace assessor/trainer straddles the organisation providing strategic support and consultancy to supervisors
The immediate supervisor or team leader:
❖ Accepts the workplace trainer/coach/mentor role
❖ Ensures the learner receives information about training/learning opportunities
❖ Helps the learner assess needs and barriers and plan and prepare for the training
❖ Coaches the learner and gives feedback
❖ Helps the learner obtain support resources from within the wider organisation and external specialists.
Career and course-related information
Personal, financial and health-related information, advice and counselling
C
Available from sources in the work area, the wider enterprise and from external specialists
Learning resources
Child care
The learner
❖ Shares responsibility for identifying own learning and support needs.
❖ Keeps immediate supervisor informed of content and progress in off-job training.
The work tasks
❖ Provide impetus for learning
❖ Provide opportunities to learn and practice new skills
❖ Guide the content of learning resources
The co-workers
❖ Demonstrate skills
❖ Encourage the learner
❖ Learn together
D

Source: SSC 1997a

In the manufacturing organisations, the supervisors delegated the training of new staff on the line to experienced team members. They monitored the progress of the training and new employees, and gave feedback to trainers and learners. The training of experienced staff in changes to procedures, the use of new equipment or production of new products was carried out by the supervisor, the equipment suppliers or technical officers. In some organisations supervisors were involved in specific training (for example, OH&S). The upskilling of experienced staff was also conducted in house or off site by TAFE, private providers or equipment suppliers. In summary, the supervisors were not extensively involved in the actual training or supporting of learners; rather, they organised it, monitored its progress, talked with team members about it, gave feedback and intervened if necessary.

Variables between organisations

Most organisations used the additional resources shown in section C of the model, but the way they did this depended upon their needs, size of the organisation, location and so on.

Section D of the model is picked up in the key indicators and described in the detail of the case studies. The team environment found in most organisations supported and encouraged learners. Most learners regarded it their responsibility to take up training opportunities offered and to seek the support needed.

The extent to which the work situation provided opportunities to learn, and enabled learners to use their new skills varied considerably. Some work on the manufacturing lines in some organisations was described by employees as 'very boring' and would not have provided much of an impetus for learning. A number of employees had undertaken training specifically to obtain different, more interesting jobs. In other organisations, work on the line was more varied, people were multiskilled and there was greater opportunity for people to use their newly acquired skills. In the service organisations, by contrast, work was much more varied and most people were able to use their new skills almost immediately and were encouraged to do so.

Section D of the model, therefore, appears to apply more readily to service enterprises than to traditional manufacturing enterprises, which are still dominated by the need to gain maximum utilisation of the expensive facilities and equipment, usually arranged in production lines.

Conclusion

This study found that, unlike the findings of *Supporting workplace learners* project, most enterprises studied had thought about and established workplace support strategies. However, it is important to remember in this context, that the organisations studied by this project were chosen for their best practice characteristics. Training Co-ordinators talked about establishing a 'learning environment' that fostered training and supported learners.

Both enterprise training personnel and VET institution support staff who attended the participant workshop were very aware of the need for learner support and the factors that make it successful. It was this knowledge and experience that jointly produced the key indicators for successful learner support.

Most of the workplace learners involved in this project considered that they were well supported. Learners in some workplaces, notably Email, suggested a number of improvements. However, this did not reflect a negative view of the support they had received. In fact it demonstrated that they had considered their support needs thoroughly, evaluated what they had received, and identified gaps and opportunities for improvement.

An important finding of this study is the similarity between what makes learner support successful in workplaces and VET institutions. The different environments shape the strategies which are established, but both must have the goal of creating a supportive, learning environment that encourages and motivates learners to achieve success.

Significantly, almost all of the learners interviewed from both environments considered the support they received most influential in the success or otherwise of their training.

The key indicators of successful learner support developed by the study collectively answer the overall research question: *How best should students receive support (informal and formal) to assist them enter and successfully complete vocational education and training?*

Although few organisations would demonstrate all the indicators, because some of them describe relatively specific training/support situations, if an organisation has most of the key indicators in place it will be providing learner support in a way that meets learners' needs and sustains effective training outcomes.

Key indicators of effective learner support

The following 14 key indicators of effective learner support were identified through analysis of the case studies and literature review. They were later developed and refined through extensive discussion at the participant workshop and ranked in order of agreed importance.

Descriptors were developed for each indicator. Examples from the case studies for each key indicator have been included to illustrate their usage.

The key indicators apply to both VET institutions and enterprises. All of the participating organisations demonstrated most of the indicators. It is not expected that an organisation will demonstrate all indicators.

The relevance of the key indicators to a particular organisation varies depending upon size and structure of the enterprise or VET institution and the types of training provided.

Key indicators 1–10

These indicators relate to the types of organisational features and learning culture necessary to foster effective learning support systems.

KEY INDICATOR 1: VALUING PEOPLE

An organisational culture which demonstrates that people are its most important resource; individual learners recognise that they are valued by the organisation

Examples/quotes from the case studies

MaxiTrans

Maxitrans has given us a lot and we are really loyal and dedicated … They show they trust us and we repay it with our loyalty.

Warner Bros. Movie World

We have a culture of positive feedback …

A system of promotion from within …

They do a lot for the staff here.

Corrective Services

Learners particularly valued the willingness of trainers to provide help.

Learners commented that the relationship between trainers and learners provided a very positive learning environment.

Learners are very appreciative of the trainers' efforts and concern for them.

KEY INDICATOR 2: THE RIGHT INDIVIDUALS IN KEY POSITIONS

Individual staff members in the organisation who take responsibility for learner support and/or ensure support systems are in place for individuals and groups of learners

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Martin College

The Dean of Students and the Counsellor both maintain regular contact with each learner ensuring continuity of support.

The Harrison Group

Employees have a strong sense of where to go for support: Just take it to Carolyn.

Stuuts & Aiello

Throughout these case studies the role of the owner–manager of a small business is firmly presented as one with direct responsibility for employee support.

KEY INDICATOR 3: A PLANNED, SYSTEMATIC AND FUNDED APPROACH TO LEARNER SUPPORT

A system for providing sufficient and appropriate resources for learner support

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Southcorp

Southcorp acknowledges that the development of a training culture takes time to establish, and has embarked on a 3–5-year structured approach.

Canberra Institute of Technology

CIT plans, establishes, funds and monitors an extremely wide range of dedicated learner support services.

Martin College

Support for the individual learner is a major strategy of the approach to all facets of the learner's experience, from counselling about the most appropriate course to undertake, through the entire learning experience, and beyond to job finding and support in employment.

KEY INDICATOR 4: A FORMAL INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROCESS

All new learners and trainees formally and effectively inducted into the organisation, including support arrangements

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Torrens Valley TAFE

The first Electronics module is on self-managed learning ... and is critical to the success of the students and the courses.

Email

Trainers considered that the induction was the most important process in the introduction of a new [person] to the workplace.

Southcorp

Southcorp regards the induction process as very important ... trainers believe this process should always be effective.

Warner Bros. Movie World

New members of staff are welcomed to Warner Bros. Movie World with:

- a one-day general induction program, 'Act One, Scene One', which includes visiting the Policy Academy Stunt Show, meeting each other and workmates
- a department/section orientation
- being matched with an experienced buddy
- their uniform which is a symbol of belonging and is a 'leveler'
- print information about the park, their job, benefits, policies and procedures

KEY INDICATOR 5: SUPPORT FROM SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Organisational culture encourages learner support at all levels; learner support an expected and measurable outcome of the work of all relevant members of the organisation

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Martin College

A 'customer service' (that is, student-centred) approach is obvious at all levels of the organisation and clearly seen as fundamental to the success of the college.

Southcorp

Southcorp is committed to training and is working to establish a training culture, which will encompass all levels of management and staff on site.

Stuuts & Aiello

Through both case studies it is evident that learner support in small business relies heavily on the level of commitment of the owner.

KEY INDICATOR 6: INCENTIVES FOR LEARNERS

Reasons provided for learners to want to learn and perform to the best of their ability, ranging from work opportunities to individual feedback, pay increases and prizes

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Warner Bros. Movie World

This organisation is possibly the best single example in the study of an organisation offering a wide and varied range of incentives ranging from verbal praise to pay increases and overseas trips.

Email

Apprentices felt that one of the most powerful motivational factors was the working environment at Email.

Apprentice wages are linked to the competencies they have achieved.

Southcorp

Southcorp pays all employees according to the level of competencies they have achieved.

Martin College

The single most important incentive to learners at this college is the extensive and successful job search service.

KEY INDICATOR 7: AN OPEN SYSTEM WITH ACCESS FOR ALL

Transparent system of learning and support, clearly visible to all and accessible for all members of the organisation

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Corrective Services

Staff are very approachable and go to considerable lengths to provide additional help.

Macarthur Group Training Limited

A major objective for this organisation is to increase the provision of training and learning opportunities where these might otherwise not be available.

Southcorp

Training is widely available and is advertised through notices, memos and the newsletter ... Rarely is anyone turned down [once they apply for training].

KEY INDICATOR 8: EVERYONE SEEN AS A LEARNER AND A TRAINER

An organisational culture in which divisions between learners and trainers are minimised and in which most members are both learners and trainers; no-one is afraid to ask for and to provide support

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Maxitrans

Trainers and learners are often the same person.

Southcorp

Trainers and learners are indistinguishable as all trainers are also learners, and a number of learners are also trainers.

Aiello

All senior staff take responsibility for helping and supervising apprentices and each other with *no-one above asking for help.*

KEY INDICATOR 9: A CRITICAL RATIO OF EXPERIENCED PEOPLE TO FOSTER LEARNING

Learning facilitated in many ways by experienced people in the organisation and suffers when numbers of these people are reduced below a critical ratio; in VET institutions, a critical ratio of full and part-time training staff is required to provide continuity of support

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Email

Many apprentices reported that the company needs the older tradespersons who knew the company history and are committed to training.

Aiello & Stuuts

Workplaces with apprentices need sufficient senior operators to act as both role models and sources of information and assistance for the apprentices.

Totalcare

Apprentices commented that the richness of their learning and range of skills acquired are facilitated by having larger numbers and a varied range of more senior tradespeople to work with.

KEY INDICATOR 10: ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT FOR TRAINERS

An organisational culture in which trainers are supported adequately in order to be able to support learners; their contribution recognised and valued

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Maxitrans

The Human Resource Manager and the Quality Manager help the on-the-job trainers.

Southcorp

In order to create a training culture ... incentives are also provided to encourage people to become trainers.

Canberra Institute of Technology

Reducing resources was a major concern for teachers, some of whom felt that the success of some learning experiences, such as field trips, were at risk due to lack of funds for such items as travel. The concern was expressed that continuing reductions will result in reduced goodwill from teachers who currently use their own cars and equipment to ensure such activities can continue.

Key indicators 11–14

These indicators identify key strategies related to specific teaching and learning practices within an organisation.

KEY INDICATOR 11: EMBEDDING LEARNER SUPPORT IN TRAINING PROVISION

Learner support an integral part of training provision for all learners not a separate service used only by those identified as 'in need'; checking progress, looking for problems, identifying and solving these in the early stages, part of the experience of every learner

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Torrens Valley TAFE

The aim of the Electronics Program Area is to encourage students to be self-motivated, independent learners and the support necessary to ensure this occurs is provided.

Teachers ... considered that they were the primary support providers (that is, rather than assuming their responsibility ends with delivering content to learners).

Martin College

Throughout this case study there are many examples of how all learners get support one-to-one without identifying themselves as having 'problems'. All have regular meetings with academic/counselling staff regarding progress at which any issues may be raised, rather than 'counselling' sessions being reserved for those students seen by staff or themselves as in difficulty.

Corrective Services

Students approach trainers they feel comfortable with ... trainers frequently assist learners outside the classroom.

KEY INDICATOR 12: A FLEXIBLE LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

Training organised around learners' needs, based on adult learning principles, delivered flexibly, and meeting the special needs of individual learners; assessment precedes learning so that training is implemented only to fill genuine needs

Examples/quotes from the case studies

Torrens Valley TAFE

The staff teach students how to learn, rather than teach content to students.

Martin College

Provision of support is based upon individual needs/personal service. Each learner progresses at his/her own pace with individual attention from teachers.

The Harrison Group

The Human Resources Manager knows each employee well and tailors individual support to suit individual needs. The HRM's attitude to employees needing support summed up by her quote *He's worth worrying about.*

KEY INDICATOR 13: A CLEAR, SINGLE COMMUNICATION POINT

A co-ordinated approach to learner support; so all learners know exactly how and where support is available and who to contact about it

Examples/quotes from the case studies

The Harrison Group

The major strength of learner support at the Harrison Group is the way in which each person's individual needs are considered and met. Much of the support relies upon the skills and resources of the HR Manager, and employees listed this as one of the best aspects of learner support at the Harrison Group.

Aiello & Stuuts

Through each case study the salon managers/owners are shown to be a clear communication point for all matters concerning support for their learners.

KEY INDICATOR 14: CO-OPERATIVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN TRAINERS AND WORKPLACE

The organisation encourages co-operative partnerships between dedicated training staff and workplace STAFF to support each other's efforts and those of learners both within and between organisations; for example, co-operation between employing organisations and VET institutions

Examples/quotes from the case studies

TotalCare

Totalcare staff worked together with the Roadmarking Association and with Construction Training Australia in developing the training package based on their 'signs and lines' course in an example of this type of collaborative effort.

Maxitrans

SMB was invited to work with Maxitrans as partners …

Canberra Institute of Technology

Students here valued the *access to teachers as expert mentors or as recognised leaders in their fields, and teachers' industry networks ensuring relevance of training and sometimes providing contacts to obtain work for students;* and *tourism students were very motivated by contact with industry networks and opportunities to work with businesses, especially where student assistance had been requested by businesses entering competitions for national awards.*

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Appendix A

Case studies

State	VET Institution	Enterprise
NSW		Aiello Hair and Health: small company, suburban Sydney location; apprentices employed.
		Stuut's: small hairdressing firm, suburban Sydney location; apprentices employed.
		Macarthur Group Training: GTC, Western Sydney location; apprentices, trainees employed and trained.
Victoria		Maxitrans: large, regional company providing training in partnership with Ballarat School of Mines, Ballarat; apprentices, trainees employed and trained.
		Southcorp Wines: large company, small Western Victoria town; partnership with RTOs and informal training provided.
South Australia	Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE, Tea Tree Gully Campus: large provider of self-paced training, Adelaide.	Email South Australia: large company, manufacturer of white goods, RTO, Adelaide; apprentices employed and trained.
Queensland	Martin College: large, private provider, Brisbane.	Warner Brothers Movieworld: large company, Gold Coast; in-house training, trainees.
ACT	Canberra Institute of Technology: large, general purpose TAFE, Canberra.	TotalCare Industries: medium-sized, government corporation, RTO, Canberra; apprentices, trainees employed and trained.
NSW—Pilot Organisations	Corrective Services Academy: medium-sized specific-purpose provider, RTO, suburban Sydney.	The Harrison Group: small company suburban Sydney location; on-job skills training for employees.

Aiello Hair and Health, Sydney

Introduction

The organisation

Aiello Hair and Health has operated in Balmain, Sydney for three years and established itself as a very successful salon, with an eight-week waiting time for appointments. The business is owned and operated by Gina Aiello with two other senior staff and two first year apprentices.

Types of training discussed

Discussions included in-salon training and off-job training provided by TAFE colleges for hairdressing apprentices.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

For hairdressing apprentices attending TAFE courses, the usual forms of TAFE-based assistance are available, generally in the form of tutorials which assist learners to grasp the content of courses.

The salon also takes responsibility for work-related basic skills, with training held after work for an hour or two each week to teach staff new techniques or to resolve problems they may be having with techniques. There are also dolly heads with wigs in the salon for practice purposes, and product information is available. Product trainers representing the various suppliers visit on salon training nights to show how to use their new products, and there are also numerous magazines, particularly from the UK, which are used to learn about new trends.

Incentives

Many of the incentives described by the staff were related to the nature of the work and they are not necessarily motivated by money or other tangible rewards. Their main motivators were:

- 'Challenge—the job is totally different every single day—definitely not boring'
- 'It's creative work'
- the opportunity to do competition work
- client return (that is, return business)
- 'Recognition that you have done a good job'
- sales targets in the salon, that is, for the number of treatments or products sold

Seniors also get bonuses or courses paid for, or memberships of associations, or payment of entry fees for competitions.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

For apprentices attending TAFE courses, the usual forms of assistance are available for any problems with basic literacy, numeracy or science in the form of tutorials.

Personal/emotional problems

There is a strong element of public performance in the work and staff must be professional at all times in the salon. It was agreed that personal problems had to be left at the door. 'If one person does not pull their weight they let down the whole team.' The business can't afford to lose clients through problems with personalities or personal habits—'without the client there is no business'.

Support in understanding workplace culture

New employees are recruited to be a good 'fit' in the workplace as far as possible, and new apprentices are trained for six months entirely in the workplace before beginning their off-job training to ensure they become very familiar with workplace culture and the high standards expected which gives them a head start, in their apprenticeship.

Role and value of learner support

In this workplace, learner support is fully integrated as part of everyday operations and difficult to separate from general employee support. All senior staff take responsibility for helping and supervising apprentices and each other with 'no-one above asking for help'. While much of this support is informal, that is, not based on written procedures, there is also considerable structure in salon-based training and incentives which help ensure high levels of performance.

Improvements suggested

Suggestions made by staff included:

- 'More staff—If we could clone ourselves so we would have more time to be informed'
- 'More apprentices to train to our standards'
- 'A computer system that works well so that we have time to do the work', that is, 'work smarter not harder'
- 'More trolleys to help keep us tidy'

Conclusion

Aiello Hair and Health has a very small workforce in a highly competitive industry. These characteristics, together with a non-authoritarian management style, have produced a tight-knit team environment with strong formal and informal learner support.

- 'It's a fun place to work, with a good team that gets on well together'
- 'The work can be stressful because you are with different people all the time and it is very public work, so it is important that this salon is friendly and the clients are also friends'
- 'We are all happy to ask each other for help or suggestions—no-one is above asking questions'

Canberra Institute of Technology, ACT

Introduction

The organisation

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) is a large multi-campus provider of a range of vocational education and training programs, and also has a strong research profile in the VET environment. The institute has an excellent reputation as a provider of vocational education and training and for its management of national projects.

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Types of training discussed

Canberra Institute of Technology campuses at Southside, Reid and Bruce were included in the study. The type of training examined was classroom-based, face-to-face training in a variety of disciplines.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

CIT learner support staff and teachers reported a wide range of support for learners in grasping the content of their courses, including:

- informal support provided by individual teachers and student co-ordinators on how to complete assignments or how to apply for extensions
- library help desks for content-related assistance, library research skills and internet research skills
- library subject guides listing classifications for each faculty
- special programs assisting women to return to the workforce
- study groups/tutorials available for international students

Self-paced

Self-managed learning support is also available, although some teachers commented that self-managed learning is inappropriate for students in lower level certificate courses. Provision includes:

- self-paced learning packages of various types, as well as one-to-one and tutorial assistance through the Access Education service (also known variously as Individual Learning Centre, Study Centre, Outreach, Access Learning)
- self-paced packages in print, video, audio and computer-based forms available as part of the library collection
- self-paced packages and other materials available from the Educational Resources Centre
- individual faculties also have some self-managed learning/assessment packages available for students, for example, food & beverage self-assessment materials

CIT students had widely varying levels of awareness of support services available, with some having very little knowledge. Overwhelmingly, students said they would first seek help with the content of courses by approaching individual teachers. Other than teachers, students nominated the Student Association as the first point of information about other forms of content-related support.

Incentives

This issue provoked some debate among teaching staff and some students about the merits of competency-based assessment, with ungraded results seen as a disincentive for some learners who may otherwise have been motivated by the opportunity to achieve high grades in their courses.

According to support and teaching staff, motivators and incentives vary between faculties and individuals and include:

- being able to gain jobs as a result of training—the most common response
- obtaining qualifications—certificates, diplomas—the second most common response
- access to modern equipment for practical work which enables learners to do the best work of which they are capable

- high standards of teaching, access to teachers as expert mentors or as recognised leaders in their fields, and teachers' industry networks ensuring relevance of training and sometimes providing contacts to obtain work for students
- gaining entry to courses with high profile/status
- personal development opportunities
- prizes awarded for high achievement in courses (although some teachers recognised that students did not necessarily know these existed until prize night, *after* the completion of their course, so the capacity of prizes to motivate learners was not always apparent during study)
- variety in teaching and assessment methods
- rapport with teachers and each other
- desire to work in the occupation in question, for example, love of music or love of children
- the Graduate Employment Service, which assists students to find jobs

Students provided a shorter list of incentives, most of which echoed those suggested by staff, but added:

- making new friends while doing the course
- getting positive feedback from teachers
- tourism students were very motivated by contact with industry networks and opportunities to work with businesses, especially where student assistance had been requested by businesses entering competitions for national awards

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

Staff reported that there is formal support provided for literacy difficulties in the form of individual learning centres at each campus at which English, maths and study skills sessions are scheduled several times a week. Some students are referred to this service by heads of departments before teachers are aware of a problem and some by teachers once a problem becomes apparent.

Other special programs are available in basic education assisting women to return to the workforce, and study groups/tutorials are available for international students to assist with language and other needs.

Personal/emotional problems

Staff believed the Student Counselling Service was the most suitable form of support in assisting students with problems. Teachers were very familiar with this service and, generally, would not hesitate to recommend it to students. However, one teacher said 'our students don't need counselling' so there may be some perceived stigma attached to accessing counselling services in some faculties.

Students with problems may initially approach individual teachers, heads of departments, student co-ordinators and others, and would generally be referred to the student counsellors by these people if required.

If the cause of the problem was financial hardship, one staff member would refer students to various charity organisations for assistance. One group of students mentioned talking to the head of department as the first point of call if in financial difficulties and felt confident some form of assistance would be available to allow students to complete courses even if fees could not be paid immediately.

Disputes are also referred to student counsellors and may include issues of harassment or discrimination occurring between students or between staff and students.

Several members of staff mentioned that confidentiality is a key issue where personal problems are concerned, with other staff being informed, by heads of department for example, only on a need-to-know basis about the problems of students, that is, if some change in their course or class arrangements was necessary.

Student counsellors have a network of other external professionals, but can usually help students manage most problems and refer students rarely, acknowledging that students generally have a range of other support available in their lives and can access other services themselves. It was also noted that external services in Canberra are fairly limited and under-resourced.

Students reported that they would access various types of support with personal problems depending upon the type of problem. Problems with study would mostly be taken to student counsellors and to individual teachers, while some other types of problems might be taken first to family or friends. One student nominated problems affecting a student's mental state as most appropriately taken to counsellors. Some students knew there were counsellors on campus, but did not know where to find them; for example, in applied science only two of twenty-seven students knew where to find the counsellor at Bruce campus, but most other students knew the counsellors' locations on the other campuses.

Disabilities

All staff nominated the services of the Disability Officer employed to assist learners with disabilities, as the main source of support for such learners. The support ranges from tutorial assistance, to learning aids of various types such as special computer screens, and providing classroom assistance such as an amanuensis or interpreter where appropriate. Teaching staff spoke very highly of the assistance provided by this service. Teachers also commented that students with disabilities were usually very self-sufficient and knowledgeable about accessing any assistance needed by the time they became students at CIT.

None of the students interviewed had needed to access this type of support—most believed there was some support available and suggested asking the student counsellors or the library staff for information. Reid students commented upon the availability of lifts providing wheelchair access to classrooms.

Other support

In addition to the categories of support listed above, other services at CIT reported by staff, include:

- one-to-one, tutorial and classroom-based assistance for speakers of other languages which is particularly successful, attracting large numbers of overseas students
- tutorial assistance available for people returning to work after a gap in employment
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for support for students, particularly on cross-cultural issues
- an accommodation service for international and interstate students and others living away from home
- child care available on the major campuses for external users as well as keeping limited places for CIT students
- special support available for workers in non-traditional areas such as women in trades and men in child care and nursing

Support for job seeking/career development

Work experience

According to staff, work placements during courses have a very positive impact on the employment prospects of graduates, and most full-time courses include work placements as an assessable part of the course, or work experience as a non-assessed component.

Some students are in apprenticeships or traineeships, which, in most cases, involve a combination of workplace training and college training, so they simultaneously gain broad-based industry skills and knowledge off-the-job, while also learning the specific requirements of one employer.

Teaching staff are usually also practitioners in the industry, able to ensure that students learn about the latest workplace standards and requirements in practical classroom work. Most courses involve practical work, for which the workplace environment is simulated as closely as possible. Many courses also involve visits/excursions to workplaces.

Employment opportunities

Teachers and other staff also place employment advertisements on noticeboards when received or discovered in newspapers, or circulate these to classes.

Business and technology teachers invite representatives of employment agencies to the college as guest speakers for classes, and courses in this faculty also include modules in work environment and job seeking skills where students are assisted with resumes and interview skills.

The Student Association helps students to find part-time work while studying, and while this is often unrelated to their course of study, it enables them to become accustomed to workplace culture and meet some of their financial needs.

The Graduate Employment Service helps students to find relevant work on completion of their courses, and at Reid campus, also offers a resume writing service and assistance with interview skills.

Support in understanding workplace culture

For full-time students at CIT workplace expectations relevant to the area of training are learned in the manner described above. Part-time students, apprentices and trainees are generally working and studying simultaneously in the field for which they are learning or improving skills.

Support from peers

There is no formal system of peer support at CIT, although international students in most faculties are provided with a 'buddy'. Most teachers use group and team work as part of normal classroom activities or for projects to encourage interaction and to assist students to learn to work in teams. Generally staff expect and encourage students to find their own study groups and networks of friends among their classmates.

Role and value of learner support

Other than teacher support for the content of learning, most other forms of support are available to learners outside the classroom and must be accessed separately from class attendance, foe example, by visiting the Student Association office, making an appointment with a student counsellor or visiting the library.

Information on services

Students nominated the following as sources of information they used to find out about support services:

- the student diary received by most students on enrolling
- the Student Association, which is often a first point of call for students to ask about, or be referred to, other services
- 'marketing' work undertaken by student counsellors in visiting classes and talking to groups of students so all students should be aware of the services available

- introductory sessions at libraries for classes, smaller groups and individuals as required, to learn about library services and how to use them
- course induction or orientation offered in most full-time courses during which students are introduced to support services
- noticeboards at all campuses containing leaflets and posters advertising support services
- campus orientation week when information and tours are provided (in some courses, not all)
- signposting around campus (varied from campus to campus—Bruce was considered particularly easy to become lost in and inadequately signposted)
- open day—prior to enrolment—where course information and campus tours are available
- international students have their own half day orientation to special services they may need

Students agreed with staff that, without the support, there would be higher drop-out rates, poorer results, and more stress for learners. Most found it hard to imagine the learning environment without a good range of support services.

Availability of support

Most types of support are equally available to full- and part-time students, but the reality of part-time learning is that many students arrive in time for their class and leave immediately afterwards and seldom make the use of services. Library and individual learning services operate during both days and evenings. Counselling and employment services operate during the day, but part-time students can make appointments or access an on-call telephone number if required. In some faculties, the courses offered at night are quite different from those available during the day and therefore attract quite different types of students with different (generally lesser) needs.

There was evidence that CIT staff felt under increasing pressure to 'do more with less' in many aspects of their work. When asked what improvements they could suggest to the support services offered or the overall learning environment, almost all suggestions required increased resources and some reported that services had been cut, or become more difficult, as a result of reduced resources.

Evaluation

In order to have a better idea of how support services are perceived and the effectiveness of the resources they use, evaluation of support services is undertaken in a number of ways. Individual teaching sections undertake evaluations which do not necessarily focus on support services, but which include some questions relevant to them, and results are used to provide feedback, mainly to teachers and heads of departments rather than to providers of support services such as counsellors or librarians.

Individual services, such as student counselling, undertake their own evaluations which are used to improve services and for personal development purposes. These also focus on who does and doesn't make use of the counselling service by providing figures of comparative use in different faculties and campuses, and are seeking to investigate whether there is any correlation between this and other factors such as student attrition rates or levels of success.

CIT as a whole undertakes an institution-wide evaluation survey each year which includes support services as well as other aspects of the student experience. It is taken very seriously and changes are made on the basis of the results, which are also used for planning purposes. Results and statistics are available to staff on electronic mail.

Other forms of feedback from learners include the CIT Student Association Focus Group and suggestion boxes.

Most students reported that they had been asked for feedback in some form, though most were not sure if support services were specifically included in the evaluations they had

completed. They were not sure what happened to their feedback, but expected it would be used to improve services, teaching, courses etc.

Improvements suggested

Suggestions by staff included:

- discontinue ungraded competency-based assessment
- better technological backup for teaching and administrative staff
- provide more simulated workplaces on campus, for example, a childcare centre, travel agency
- provide a better, brighter learning environment, which is more environmentally responsible
- more child care places and longer hours of access
- provide more stability, less change and jargon in CIT operations
- more staff development and more student and staff exchanges with other institutions to share ideas and learn how others are doing things and come back with new ideas
- provide induction for teachers before commencing teaching
- create a real community environment at each campus by providing doctors, dentists, news agents, banks and shops, sporting facilities and really good supporting facilities for staff and students. CIT could be more accessible to and more integrated with the community in sharing these facilities
- more support and recognition of teachers as valued professionals
- pre-course assessment/evaluation for learners to find out what they really need to learn before courses begin
- offer learning tailored to all the individual learning styles
- re-introduce the campus nurses
- close the gap between classroom assessment and workplace assessment
- a peer mentoring system for staff
- more flexibility in the way the institution operates so changes and improvements can be made more easily
- more consideration of OH&S issues with large class sizes using dangerous equipment, and in too small a space
- more industry involvement in helping prepare potential workers, more teacher contact with industry so courses are designed with industry, opportunity for teachers to do return to industry placements to maintain contacts and keep skills up to date
- courses for student interests rather than just work-related courses, leisure courses—survey students to find out what they would like
- 24-hour access to libraries, computers, study centres etc, with some level of staffing covering the 24 hours
- more support for students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia
- more assistance for overseas students to ensure tests and assessments are really understood
- courses without assessment to build self-esteem—especially before joining vocational classes
- have better trained teachers, and ensure the standard of people before they are put in front of a class

Generally students needed some encouragement to suggest improvements, some of which echoed those above, but their additional ideas included:

- more meetings between students and staff to discuss changes

- free textbooks—textbooks used in class when purchased
- free parking, resurface car park (Reid)
- a better orientation week with entertainment and free food
- more social activities
- more shelter when it rains
- free food and more variety in food available
- voice-activated computers for students without keyboard skills
- student bar
- warmer classrooms
- cheaper childcare

Conclusion

CIT provides a wide range of vocational education and training programs. As it is a public sector organisation, with policies of open access, it must also cater to a wide range of students. This has seen the development of comprehensive support services to assist learners complete their courses successfully.

At the same time, there is no doubt resources are tight and teachers, in particular, are feeling the pressure of trying to achieve more with less, especially in managing large class sizes and completing modules in short timeframes.

Students nominated the following list as the 'best' aspects of support available at CIT:

- the quality of teachers and curriculum—teacher expertise in their field
- the ready availability of extra help and teacher availability—'much better than school'
- being treated as adults by staff
- gaining work-related skills and having confidence built up by staff
- flexibility of learning and opportunity to use flexible delivery for additional assistance if needed
- the Student Counselling service
- the library staff who help with assignments and research

Corrective Services Academy, Sydney

Introduction

The organisation

The NSW Corrective Services Academy trains 300–400 new custodial officers for NSW correctional centres each year and provides professional development for serving officers. The academy occupies the Brush Farm complex in Eastwood, Sydney.

Types of training discussed

The Corrective Services Academy conducts primary training of new recruits, and the in-service programs such as computer training, management training and workplace development and education.

This case study concentrates on the provision of primary training, rather than in-service programs.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

Trainers frequently assist learners outside the classroom, either in one-to-one sessions, or small groups if a number of people have similar problems. Trainers commented that some recruits do not like asking questions in class, but will talk with trainers after class about problems they are having with the content or specific issues discussed.

Currently students approach trainers they feel comfortable talking with. The academy used to provide a formal mentoring program, with recruits being assigned to trainers. However, the trainers interviewed considered that the current, more informal approach worked better for learners.

Learners particularly valued the willingness of trainers to provide help after class. They commented that the staff were very approachable and went to considerable lengths to provide additional help.

Trainers often provide learners with additional exercises or activities in content areas that are causing them particular concern. Learners were pleased that they could get these extra activities or exercises. Trainers usually mark this extra work in their own time.

Incentives

Trainers feel a strong sense of responsibility for the recruits they work with, and that their success can be judged by the ease with which the recruits they have taught fit into the role of a correctional service officer.

An important incentive for learners to do well in the course was the secure nature of the employment that they had chosen to enter, with its career structure, promotional opportunities, good pay and regular overtime.

Learners reported that an additional incentive was provided by the adult learning environment at the academy. They appreciated the opportunity to be responsible for their own learning. Learners also commented that the relationships between trainers and learners provided a very positive learning environment.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Trainers may be able to work through any problem or issue with the learner. If further help is needed, the trainee may then talk with the psychologist at the academy. If a learner is having difficulty coming to terms with the content of the training (for example, weapons training) the person is given time to work through their problems. The 'easy going relationship' between learners and staff meant that there was always somebody to talk with.

Support for job seeking/career development

The academy provides training for people who have been selected for a specific position. Many of the new recruits are mature aged, looking for a career change. A major function of the Academy is to train people to take up the new role they have chosen.

Support in understanding workplace culture

Teamwork and practical experience

The academy training introduces new recruits to the skills, knowledge and attitudes they will need to carry out the very demanding job of a correctional services officer. One of the most important aspects is being a member of a team and being able to rely on the members of your team. Activities include:

- a team development day held in the first week of training
- videos of correctional centres
- trainees visit one correctional centre early in their training
- real life experiences of trainers are shared

It is essentially a practical training program which aims to prepare the new recruits for the harsh reality of the correctional centres.

Support from peers

New recruits learn that they can ask their peers and trainers for assistance when they need it.

Trainers commented that the recruits assist each other and work well together. Some groups of learners include people who are returning to correctional services work. These people often take on the role of 'support provider' for the whole group, solving problems, talking over issues, helping with assignments, etc.

Role and value of learner support

Responsibility for providing and seeking support

While trainers and learners both commented that learners usually initiate the request for help, the responsibility for seeking and providing help rests on all concerned—instructors, psychologist and trainees. Learners are encouraged to (and do) ask for assistance when they feel they need it. Without it the number of recruits who leave the service within 12 months would be much greater.

> *It would all break down without it. People wouldn't get through the course, especially without the attitude of the trainers.*

Learners felt that the support structures provided by the academy made this straightforward and non-threatening.

Improvements suggested

Improvements suggested by trainers include:

- each instructor to case-manage a nominated group of students; currently it is left open and it is up to the trainer and/or student to make contact, and students may 'fall through the cracks' and not get help when they need it
- ongoing professional development from the day the students commence training; the first professional development is provided after they have finished primary training, which is often too late; sometimes they need training tailored to their specific placement, for example, women's correctional centers; currently they are able to do this two years later when it is far too late; specialist training should be available far earlier and could prevent drop out of officers
- a much greater range of support for students, for example, CD ROM, videos, better library facilities, self-paced learning materials
- better teaching facilities (like Barton College, Canberra) as training rooms are very traditional

Improvements suggested by learners included:

- Obtaining uniforms when they start at the academy, rather than waiting until their first correctional centre placement; this is important to learners, as they consider that wearing the uniform would make them feel more a part of the 'correctional services team'
- The material that had been sent to the new recruits, prior to coming to the academy, was not sufficiently detailed; this was especially important to people from out of Sydney who 'live in', for example, some recruits had not brought appropriate clothes.

Conclusion

The Corrective Services Academy provides specialised training for a very stressful work environment. This requires knowledgeable and ongoing learning support for trainees. At the Corrective Services Academy there is a very close working relationship between trainers and students. Trainers really care about the students and their fate when they begin work in the correctional centres. The trainers totally understand the environment the students will be working in, and have a strong drive to equip the students well to enable them to succeed in their new career. As a result, trainers go to considerable lengths, far beyond normal working hours, to provide an effective teaching and learning environment and students are very appreciative of the trainers' efforts.

Email Limited, Adelaide

Introduction

The organisation

Email has been a major whitegoods manufacturer in South Australia for 150 years. There are four Email sites in Adelaide known as divisions, with each division making different products. Email employs about 1200 people across these four factories.

Types of training discussed

Email is involved in a wide range of training activities, including management, leadership, apprenticeship, trainees, specific skills training (for example, OH&S), operator training. This case study looked in detail at the training of apprentices, and, briefly, at trainee and operator training.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

Apprentices

Apprentices have eight months of initial full-time training at the Email Training Centre at Beverley. During that time the Training Co-ordinator provides most of their support. *He drops everything when they need help.* In their induction he tells them that they come first and they feel that he acts that way. He uses a problem-posing and solving approach to learning which assists learners to solve the problem themselves and be more independent.

At the training centre, apprentices work through training modules at their own pace. As they progress through the modules they are assessed and have their competencies marked off. The Training Co-ordinator 'nurses' them through the first few modules to make sure they know what they are doing and achieve early successes. The Training Co-ordinator then spends time with them on a one-to-one basis as specific problems arise.

Email provides apprentices with the structure, which enables them to move through the competencies at the speed they are comfortable with. Apprentices are required to report on each job they do in their log-books and indicate which competencies they have achieved while doing it. The Training Co-ordinator provides a monthly printout, and an evaluation, on their progress. The apprentices evaluate their own progress over the month and the Training Co-ordinator fills out the same evaluation sheet about them. While at the training centre, the Training Co-ordinator and each apprentice meet at least monthly to talk about their progress, differences in their evaluations, problems etc.

First year apprentices commented that the training system made them aware of what they were learning:

> *A lot of the time you don't really know what you are learning. When you are doing activities you don't think about what really is involved. But when you write up the activity you realise that it might have involved team-building, problem-solving, communication etc as well as the technical skills. It makes you really understand what the competencies are all about.*

The Training Co-ordinator reported having an 'open door' for all apprentices and they come to talk about all types of problems, for example, for help understanding a module, to solve problems with the written material, for help with practical exercises, to discuss career options etc.

Apprentices (like all the other apprentices interviewed) liked the self-paced training because it enabled them to race ahead in the modules they had some prior experience of or found straightforward. The older apprentices commented that the self-paced training system made them fairly competitive with each other as they all tried to get through them first.

Email's aim is to make the apprentices independent, so they can function effectively in the divisions. A first year tradesperson reported:

> *I am working by myself all the time now. The engineer in charge of the project I am doing tells me what has to be done and I have to work out how to do it. There's nobody to ask. I like it. It throws me back on my own resources.*

Once in the divisions, apprentices work with all the trades people in the area they are allocated to, as they are not assigned to one person. However, the role of team leader is crucial in supporting all trainees and providing and co-ordinating on-the-job training. A team leader reported that:

> *when an apprentice comes to me with a problem I discuss it fully with them. For example an apprentice recently came to me with a general training query. I discussed the issue and all the background that went with it until he really understood what it was all about and I finished off by saying—please come and talk to me if you have any problems.*

Apprentices reported that they need to get help from the tradespeople in the area in which they work. They had to work out over time the people who would help them and those who would not. Some apprentices 'buddy' with an older apprentice or first year tradesperson. One apprentice reported that she was:

> *... embarrassed at first about asking questions, especially being a girl. I thought they would think that I was dumb. I realise now that all the apprentices felt the same so now I don't think twice about asking. If I think it is a really stupid question—I still go ahead and ask as usually the question is not stupid at all.*

Trainees

The on-the-job training of trainees is carried out on the production lines. They are initially assigned to a person whom they observe until they have learnt the specific tasks involved. The traineeship rotates them through the whole factory so that they learn all production tasks. They spend every third week in the training centre working through the self-paced off-the-job component. The aim of the traineeship is to produce highly skilled personnel. Trainers report that the early support from the Training Co-ordinator is critical to this happening.

Production workers

Training of production workers progressing up the competencies is provided one day a week for a specified period with TAFE teachers coming to Email to do the training in class groups. One production worker commented that:

> *Training gives me a better understanding of the factory. I understand preventative maintenance better. I can prevent problems happening and save the company a lot of money. I have become more personally involved in what is happening in the factory.*

Incentives

Apprentice wages are matched against the competencies they have achieved. There are seven levels of pay across the three trades (electrical, mechanical and refrigeration). Each level has a specified number of mandatory and optional competencies to be achieved. A keen apprentice can work through the system quickly. The apprentices reported that the opportunity for pay increases was a strong incentive. They thought that it was a very good system and motivated them to achieve the competencies quickly. If people do not move up the system and do not get their competencies marked off regularly, they are approached to discuss the situation and any problems they may be having. They are not left to fall too far behind.

Email pays the fees and allows 50% of the study to be carried out in work time for VET training (by TAFE or a private provider) that is relevant to the person's job. One fourth year apprentice reported:

> *I'm doing an advanced certificate and am nearly finished. The advanced certificate includes modules that I do not need for my work which I study in my own time. When I am finished I will be at C5 level, but am at C10 now and I have to be working at this level for a certain period of time before I can get a pay increase. The pay is related to your qualifications, skills, experience and type of work you are doing.*

All the apprentices felt that one of the most powerful motivational factors for them was the working environment at Email. One apprentice said that:

> *It has a good atmosphere. I enjoy coming here. The trainer is like a friend. We have a very good relationship with him. I've always felt that we could tell him if we did not like anything.*

Production workers reported that increased job satisfaction was the main motivation as the pay increase was very small.

Meeting the special needs of learners

There are three possible steps to problem-solving. Trainees firstly talk with the team leader. If they are not comfortable with the team leader they can go to the supervisor and then go to Human Resources section. It is important to get the team leader involved, as many problems have to be solved by the team leader and the team. The HR manager reported often acting as a mediator, while the team solves the problem. Far more female than male employees approach her about their problems.

Apprentices reported that they would discuss personal problems with the team leader or a tradesperson they felt comfortable with. They reported that one tradesperson is like a father figure, and he is always asking them how things are going. Apprentices who work in his area would go to him first. If it was a serious harassment problem they would go to the team leader and if that didn't work they would go to the supervisor, or even the divisional manager (whom they considered quite approachable).

Disabilities

Email modifies the work environment for any staff with disabilities or special needs. They may also provide specific support services, as required.

Other support

For workers from non-English-speaking backgrounds trainers use somebody else in the factory who speaks the same language as an interpreter. A number of Human Resource documents are written in the common languages spoken in the four factories. A team leader reported that he took time to explain a new job to people with limited English. He added that a number of people had asked him for assistance with written English and that:

> *We all help each other—so we do not find we have a language barrier really.*

Support for job seeking/career development

Apprentices

Trainers report that Email provides apprentices with the opportunity to explore and learn as much as they can. There are almost no restrictions on the lengths they can go to learn as much as they can from the area in which they are working. Email will only finance people to study for a university degree if it is directly related to their current job or expected career path.

The Training Co-ordinator develops a training plan with each apprentice covering the four years of their apprenticeship. He encourages them to gain as much as they can while they are at Email for the four years as nobody knows whether they will be offered a position at the completion of their apprenticeship.

He stresses that they will have far greater chance of gaining employment elsewhere, if they have a number of skills to take with them as it is not enough these days to be an 'average tradesperson'.

A female apprentice considered that she had more limited opportunities, because of her inability to lift heavy objects. As a result she could not expect to work her way up from the 'floor' through promotion. Her solution was to study a specialist area, pneumatics, so she could move from Email at the end of her apprenticeship to a totally different field. Another female apprentice was negotiating with Email to support her commencing a second apprenticeship (with RPL for all the common subjects) to become a dual-trade maintenance tradesperson.

Trainees

Trainees are told at the interview and induction that they will have the opportunity to apply for an apprenticeship. By the end of the traineeship, trainees have worked in most areas of the factory where they work and are valuable employees.

Support in understanding workplace culture

Induction

Trainers considered that the induction was the most important process in the introduction of a new apprentice, trainee or employee to the workplace. The Training Manager runs them through a session called 'Build a factory'. They talk about what is needed in a factory (for example, buildings, internal and external environment, people, tools, equipment) and what the factory does. This exercise helps give them an overall concept of why a business exists, an understanding of the bigger picture of Email and where all the divisions fit together. Apprentices have two inductions: the first is when they join Email and the second is when they move to their division. Many apprentices recalled their feeling at the prospect of leaving the training centre and going to the divisions. They felt protected in the training centre and that going into the 'big, big world of the divisions' was fairly daunting, as they did not know anybody and were not sure what was expected of them. One apprentice, who had organised to spend one day a month in the division, did not have any of these concerns and was envied by his peers.

The few apprentices who had come to Email from school had found the transition very difficult. A female apprentice related that she had found the introduction to Email very difficult—because she was a girl. She had found it very hard, especially at first, because she had felt that she had to prove to everyone that she could do it. This was despite her successful completion of an engineering VET-in-Schools course. She felt that she would have pulled out but for the eight months full-time in the training centre.

New trainees have an induction program in their first week that includes an introduction to Email, OH&S, heavy lifting, industrial relations, the quality system, continuous improvement and an introduction to the division they will work in. The aim is to ease trainees into the workplace culture.

Induction for new production employees includes human resource issues, OH&S, heavy lifting, Email's expectations of them, what Email provides (canteen, Health Centre Cottage, training), an introduction to the quality system. They then are introduced to the area where they are to work and are assigned to an experienced worker who shows them how to do their initial job.

Support from peers

Teamwork

Email considers that team work is essential. All work is in teams in the factory, and most maintenance work is also based on team work.

> *If you had questions or did not understand, you asked your mates first.*

Some apprentices missed the camaraderie of being in the training centre when they went to the divisions. In full-time training the apprentices felt that they were a well bonded group, but after going to the divisions they did not see much of each other. One apprentice recalled:

> *Where I worked 1 or 2 apprentices from each year would get together about once a month and talk about what was happening but that stopped happening after a while because supervisors did not want to let us go off for the 1–2 hours it took. It was a good idea and should have been continued. Even if we could have got together only four times a year—it would have been useful way of solving problems.*

Role and value of learner support

Trainers, apprentices, trainees and production workers all agreed that the support provided by Email is vital for the effectiveness of training. Management regarded it as essential to apprentices becoming good tradespeople and trainees becoming effective employees.

Responses from apprentices included:

> *The support is essential. You would get nowhere without it …*
>
> *It would be a fair bit harder without the support we get …*
>
> *The support we got from the Training Co-ordinator in the training centre was really important. And his support is still there once we have gone to the divisions …*

Responsibility for providing and seeking support

Trainers report that apprentices, trainees and production workers undertaking training are expected to take the initiative. It is the responsibility of management to provide a learning environment and have the necessary support available but it is the responsibility of the learner to ask for help. Supervisors and team leaders are expected to watch, monitor, 'teach' and provide help.

An older tradesperson considered it was his responsibility to look after the apprentices; to bring them up and sort out their problems. He reported having a 'father role' with the apprentices (he is the oldest) and they tend to come to him more often than anyone else, especially with job-related problems. He always spends more time with them on a problem, treating it as a training exercise and getting them to work through the solution. Many of the younger tradespeople just tell them what to do. The result is:

> *they come to me. They have to be able to solve problems. The support system used nurtures problem solving skills that are so essential for maintenance tradesmen.*

Improvements suggested

Suggestions by apprentices included:

- The maintenance area is being cut and tradespeople are very busy. If this trend continues the ability of the area to do the on-the-job training will suffer. Email needs more tradespeople to train the apprentices on-the-job.
- Apprentices tend not to be involved in the 1 day training that Email provides, for example, rigging. Often they do not hear about the training until too late. Their rotation through the Divisions makes it difficult to work out who should pay for the training.
- Apprentices should be given more assistance to become multiskilled.
- Apprentices should be given the opportunity to return to the training centre to fill any training gaps, gain the competencies that they were not able to achieve, learn about applying for a job, writing a resume, etc.
- Some people were not given enough warning prior to movement to another division.
- It takes a long time before new tradespeople are seen as anything but an apprentice, even when they have finished their time.
- Apprentices should be free to join a union. It is not written in the contract that they can not join, but they feel they are discouraged from doing so.
- The Email competencies book should be adapted to South Australian conditions. It is difficult to do some of the competencies because the equipment is not available, the divisions operate differently and there are idiosyncrasies in the South Australian industrial climate. The redesign of the competencies book should have input from apprentices.
- A mentor for apprentices in the divisions would be a good idea.
- The eight-month full-time course should be formally evaluated.
- The transition from the training centre to the divisions should be improved (for example, greater interaction with the division or going there one day a month)
- A trainer is needed in the training centre with Email factory experience who really understands the factory and the apprentices. Need someone who knows which apprentices will fit into which sections and divisions because they know the personalities well.

Conclusion

As this case study demonstrates, Email has a considerable commitment to training. Management contends that they are creating a training culture. The majority of the apprentices and production workers interviewed would agree.

The overwhelming impression from talking with the apprentices is that they like their jobs, enjoy the training and realise that they are in a much more favourable position than many young people, as illustrated by the following quote:

Apprentices here get a good deal. We are very lucky here.

The apprentices nominated many positive learning support experiences that had stood out. The one that was mentioned most often was the period of full-time training at the training centre.

Most apprentices stated that rotating them through the divisions gave them very broad learning experiences, from which they benefited greatly. The other 'best experience' that was mentioned frequently was the support they were given to do training.

Being an Email apprentice was described by one apprentice (and endorsed by the group) as:

This is like my hobby ... I really like what I am doing

The Harrison Group, Sydney

Introduction

The organisation

The Harrison Group was founded in 1923 by Arthur Stanley Harrison, specialising in the distribution of raw materials for the rubber industry. It now manufactures and exports specialised materials for the petroleum, rubber, surface coating, plastics, pharmaceutical, cosmetics and fire protection industries. There are fifty people employed at the factory in the Sydney suburb of Brookvale and the company is still run by the Harrison family.

Types of training discussed

The types of training discussed at the Harrison Group were on-job skills-based training and training in English both for learners from non-English-speaking backgrounds and for business applications.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

The Harrison Group HR Manager explained that they usually try to employ people with the basic skills required to learn the job, and use a basic English and Maths test to help ensure this. However there are and have been employees who need additional help. Job-related skills are unique to the organisation and are taught on the job by the foreman and co-workers in accordance with a structured training plan. Co-workers generally help each other learn the basics of the job and use instruction books/procedure manuals which help new employees learn the procedures.

Incentives

The HR Manager felt that the best incentive is the move to implementing training which is tied to wage increases so employees have an opportunity to earn more by taking on training. Employees and the foreman agreed that linking grades and pay to training is a major incentive to learn.

The company also pays fees for external courses undertaken by employees when relevant to their work. Up-front payment may also be made for employees to attend courses of direct relevance to their work such as supervisory skills.

Some employees also reported that they chose to learn, and are prepared to pay for, other skills such as Business English to ensure future opportunities. Other incentives, which they believe contribute to the relative stability of the workforce include there always being something new to learn and the challenge of new products.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

At the time of this research, a collaborative venture with the local NSW TAFE college was being organised with arrangements being made for ESL teachers to work with the Harrison Group employees in exchange for obtaining much-needed industrial experience.

Personal/emotional problems

The HR Manager is the main support person for personal problems of all types. On rare occasions more serious problems may be referred to external counselling services and allowances are made for employees who are trying to overcome serious personal problems.

Employees and the foreman agreed that most personal problems are referred to the HR Manager, *Just ask Carolyn*, but said their foreman and manager can also be approached. Employees particularly like the multicultural nature of the workforce and that everyone gets on very well together.

Other support

The HR Manager knows each employee well and tailors individual support to suit individual needs. As all employees must be trained in the unique skills required, it is normal to begin with more mundane tasks and be individually trained to take on higher level skills, for example, as a blender, including any required basic skills training.

Support in understanding workplace culture

Induction

All employees go through initial induction training to learn about the company, products, practices, and safety, and they are shown around and introduced to people over the first couple of hours. They are then taught their first basic tasks and introduced to the tools used. This is done individually and tailored to individual needs. New employees are also given assistance as needed by co-workers.

Support from peers

Although there is no formal peer support system, new employees are usually placed with a person who has been in the area for a while, and helped to work through a structured training program to learn their job. Employees nominated assistance and cooperation from co-workers as one of the best aspects of the workplace.

Role and value of learner support

Informal support

Most learner support at the Harrison Group is informal and individually tailored to employees' needs. Given the size and nature of the company, a more personal approach is taken to learner support. The Harrisons make sure they know every employee and take an interest in the whole organisation.

Despite its informality, learner support was seen as important and it was considered the workplace might be fairly chaotic at times without it as it contributes to teambuilding and industrial harmony.

Employees would be more likely to look for another job with new challenges without the opportunity to learn new skills.

Responsibility for providing and seeking support

The HR Manager is primarily responsible for employee support, along with the Operations Manager who runs the factory. The foreman and employees believed both individuals and the company should share responsibility for learner support so workplace needs and individual needs are not necessarily treated in the same ways.

There is no formal record-keeping or evaluation of learner support specifically, although the HR Manager keeps a confidential diary of all problems handled in order to have a history of what has occurred.

Feedback

Employees nominated the consultative committee as the main forum for feedback, where representatives of each area meet to raise problems and discuss solutions and pass these on to management as a way of making improvements. The foreman said that feedback forms are written as a form of record about whether people are suitable for doing the job following training and what they should do next. He noted that records are necessary to assist the careful liaison required to ensure training schedules don't interfere with production.

Improvements suggested

The foreman and factory employees suggested:

- the opportunity to continue to improve skills by learning about the laboratory and developing the skills required to work there
- 'It would be good if all types of TAFE training were paid for, but then people might leave'
- more time to make the job easier and facilitate access to training. The major strength of learner support at the Harrison Group is the way in which each person's individual needs are considered and met. Much of the support relies upon the skills and resources of the Human Resources Manager, and employees listed this as one of the best aspects of learner support at the Harrison Group:

  Pay is not the only incentive. If the company makes work interesting you don't want to leave. More training gives you more choice, and more incentives mean you are more likely to stay.

Conclusion

The major strength of learner support at the Harrison Group is the way in which each person's individual needs are considered and met. Much of the support relies upon the skills and resources of the HR Manager, and employees listed this as one of the best aspects of learner support at the Harrison Group:

Knowing problems can be raised and handled and the HR Manager will help.

Opportunities to progress and incentives to do so. Also the security of knowing the company is progressing and will go on for a long time.

Feedback from the training means we will perform according to the quality system that we have so we put out a good product and gain satisfaction and security in the job.

However, it should be noted that reliance on one individual for learner support also leaves it vulnerable should there be a change in company personnel.

Macarthur Group Training Ltd, Sydney

Introduction

The organisation

Macarthur Group Training Limited (MGTL) operates in the Sydney region of Macarthur, and incorporates a registered training organisation, Macarthur Retail and Business Training Services (MRBTS). The Group Training Company organises and monitors apprenticeships and traineeships with host employers.

Types of training discussed

The formal training of trainees and apprentices, both on- and off-job, was discussed with staff of MGTL. The learners interviewed were studying office skills.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

MGTL is the formal employer of trainees and apprentices. It places them with host employers for their on-job training and with TAFE, private providers or with MRBTS for their off-job training, and monitors all training arrangements. Apart from periodic visits, staff of MGTL are unlikely to have a great deal of individual contact with the learners, so do not generally provide learners with support in grasping the content of their courses. Learners receive this support from their host employer and/or off-job training provider in the same way as other students of these organisations

The office skills trainees completing their off-job training with MRBTS nominated their teacher as the main source of support in learning the content of their course. The teacher provides extra hand-outs, access to text books and videos.

The trainees had little difficulty managing work and study—*It's not hard; everything is done in working hours so there is no extra study. Some (off-job) topics are easy to relate to work and others not so easy, but we are learning broad skills because we might end up working elsewhere.*

The trainees also said that the atmosphere at MRBTS is very different from school because *the teacher is here to help us and spends time individually with everyone.* They also like competency-based assessment where learners are not in competition with each other. *We can help each other and the atmosphere is better.*

Incentives

The General Manager and HR Officer believe the main incentive for apprentices is the trade qualification and tradesperson status. Some are also motivated by the possibility of using an apprenticeship as a stepping stone to their own business. However, there is a large number of people leaving apprenticeships to go into the casual workforce which is more highly paid.

Office and retail trainees are thought to be more driven by attaining skills and office trainees particularly look for broad transferable skills. Retail is seen as more of a fill-in job but people may take it on because that it is all that is available.

The office skills trainees said their main incentives are getting their certificates and being recognised for what they are doing. They believed that *actually getting the piece of paper is important* and getting the work experience at the same time was considered a bonus. Some trainees also need to have the income.

For trainees attending TAFE, MGTL reimburses the TAFE administration fee of $160 a student in addition to supplying the module books required. There is no extra assistance for apprentices, however and purchase of safety footwear and clothing is their responsibility.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

MGTL test for literacy and numeracy using an in-house test when recruiting apprentices and trainees but some do still need more assistance. As some employers find their own apprentices and trainees, these may be employed without screening for literacy and numeracy so, again, some may need assistance which is supplied largely by the off-job training provider.

Personal/emotional problems

MGTL does not have a close relationship with every trainee or apprentice and their involvement is in performance management counselling which they do every three months. Where there are issues which need to be addressed, the regularity of visits will increase. MGTL provides a 24-hour message service, answering service and mobile phone numbers. The General Manager and HR Officer believe most apprentices will identify more with their host employer after the induction period, but they still have a role in counselling them on issues like poor performance, absenteeism or lack of motivation. MGTL can also mediate if there are difficulties between the apprentice/trainee and their host employer.

The Office Skills trainees said they would tend to deal with most personal problems at home or with friends, but if the problem was to do with work they would ask the teacher and staff at MGTL to help depending on what the problem was. They felt the support needed for individual problems would vary greatly depending upon the problem.

Disabilities

MGTL can access and organise funds and assistance for learners with disabilities through the relevant government bodies but have had little experience with this. The General Manager suggested some people may choose not to notify MGTL of their disabilities and most adults with disabilities know about the various government funds and services available to help them by the time they become apprentices or trainees.

Support for job seeking/career development

As a group training company MGTL employs learners only during the traineeship or apprenticeship. They advise them to talk to their host employer a month before they graduate to find out if there is a job there for them. The General Manager said most of the apprentices tend to stay with their host employer and those that don't have probably decided to go elsewhere to work themselves. Fewer trainees are retained by host employers, but at least have some skills to offer in searching for jobs. MGTL doesn't follow them up to see how successful they are in gaining further employment.

Support in understanding workplace culture

Induction

Many students take advantage of the VET-in-Schools program and do vocational courses at school so have some familiarity with workplace culture and demands before becoming apprentices or trainees.

Once they are recruited, MGTL provides company orientation, and induction to OH&S. Then they start work and the employer introduces them to the individual workplace.

Support from peers

There is no peer support at MGTL because learners do not meet there but it may occur at TAFE because that is the only place apprentices meet each other. Some larger host employers organise peer support for apprentices, with older ones helping the newer ones.

Role and value of learner support

MGTL is uniquely placed to act as an intermediary between apprentices/trainees and their host employers and can therefore mediate when there are difficulties in that relationship. This was seen as one of the best aspects of the support available to learners.

No formal evaluation or statistics are kept on support provided to learners, but MGTL do keep file notes on outcomes and problems as they are dealt with.

Trainees felt the support was a very important feature of their learning.

Half of us wouldn't be here without the level of support. People here and at work usually take an interest in how we are going and what we are learning and that is important.

Improvements suggested

The General Manager and HR Officer suggested:

It would be good to have one extra person in the field to allow for the level of follow-up we'd like to do.

In an ideal world I'd like the ability to visit workplaces more frequently, but there is a necessary balance between being 'in their face' all the time and not there enough. Our customers (employers) buy freedom from administrative work from us so we have to spend the time on that, but visiting a little more frequently would be good so we could prevent issues from arising by 'nipping them in the bud'.

It would also be useful to help employers more with the paperwork, which is not their forte, in completing logbooks and signing off skills completed.

The ability to liaise more directly with the training provider and have better reporting mechanisms about attendance and progress at TAFE would also be useful. We get six-monthly reports, if they issue them, and the reports are minimal. Procedures vary from college to college—even in the same trade areas there are inconsistencies and it is difficult because of the large numbers dealt with.

Suggestions made by trainees, included:

- more support at work in the very small companies where there is not much to do or not much variety in the work

More workplace training—so the employer would have more time to teach you.

- a minimum standard for the size of company which can take a trainee so that they could provide a certain range of work
- being placed with more than one employer during the year to get a variety of experience
- more money

Conclusion

MGTL plays an important role in placing apprentices and trainees with host employers, in monitoring their training progress and in ensuring the relationships between apprentices/trainees and host employers runs smoothly.

Trainees maintained that: 'All the support you get as a whole is the best thing here'. They were very happy to have the security of having a job at least in the short term, and were also happy that, at the same time as gaining skills and qualifications, they were gaining the much-needed experience that would help them in applying for subsequent jobs. 'It is much better than just going to TAFE full-time where we wouldn't get paid or get the work experience, just the certificate.'

Martin College, Brisbane

Introduction

The organisation

Martin College, formerly Lorraine Martin College is a registered training organisation with campuses in Brisbane, Sydney, Gold Coast and Cairns. Martin College campuses teach over 7000 students a year in courses including Business, Information Technology, Hospitality,

Travel and Tourism, Graphic Design, International Business, Office Administration, Marketing/Management and English Language Preparation Programs.

Types of training discussed

Discussions at the Brisbane campus of Martin College included the provision of off-job training in full and part-time courses, traineeships in business and travel and the emphasis on learner personal development by the college.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

Provision of support is based upon individual needs and much of the teaching is one-to-one or in very small groups, in line with the system of rolling enrolments in place at the college. Types of support include:

- tutorial support/extra tuition (at no extra cost)
- regular interviews with the Dean of Students regarding progress or any problems
- individual attention concentrated on helping each individual pass their modules and obtain a job
- workbooks, reference library, assessment guides and marking guides prior to assessment
- flexible timetables to allow faster/slower completion of modules
- study skills and stress management skills taught in orientation
- induction materials/induction program with Dean of Students and College Counsellor as well as induction to each module carried out by individual teachers

Incentives

The major incentives identified by learners included:

- the job placement scheme (the most commonly reported incentive)
- gaining university entrance and/or credits
- friendly and personal service/atmosphere and individual follow-up
- opportunity to develop business English and associated skills is an added incentive for international students
- paying fees for the courses
- being taught goal-setting and positive visualisation as part of induction
- the adult learning environment which is 'much better than school'
- approachable teachers, friendly/pleasant atmosphere
- the need to maintain attendance levels in order to get interviews for jobs
- enjoyment in learning

Meeting the special needs of learners

Personal/emotional problems

Staff encourage students to take personal problems wherever they are comfortable to seek help—a teacher or traineeship co-ordinator, the Dean of Students or College Counsellor. Regular counselling sessions are organised with the College Counsellor when required and students will be referred on to the counsellor's network of contacts if necessary for more specialised help.

Disabilities

Students with disabilities are rare, and each case handled as required by the individual.

Other support

Students are encouraged to approach for help whenever needed and a friendly atmosphere is maintained at all times. The Student Council assists in ensuring students' needs are known and met.

Course consultants assist in initial course selection to ensure learners enrol in courses in line with their work ambitions and abilities. Homestay accommodation is organised if needed for country/overseas students living away from home (approximately 50% of total students) so they can live with a family.

Other features reported by learners as important to them were:

- being treated as adults
- relevance of learning to the workplace
- expertise/knowledge of teachers
- work experiences of teachers used in the classroom

Support for job seeking/career development

Employment placement

The high level of job seeking support offered at Martin College was seen as the best aspect of learner support by many students. The college works with an employment placement agency achieving 99% success in placing students into jobs on completion of their courses. The agency staff matches graduating students to vacancies available. Before enrolment, all students are interviewed individually to assist in appropriate course selection in line with career aspirations/interests, although all do a basic business core before specialising in a stream of study and all are taught how to use *Job search* and resume writing.

Students also believed that work experience is a good opportunity to learn and perhaps obtain a job with a placement company. 'Lots' of modules are workplace-related: 'we have to dress for work, we're taught to write resumes, and practise interviews'. Learners are also helped to get jobs with employers found/known by the college teaching staff.

Support in understanding workplace culture

Work experience

Work experience is organised for most students and is an optional but usual part of their learning experience. As far as possible, workplace standards, equipment, expectations, are simulated in classrooms. College dress code is 'business attire' and standards for punctuality and appropriate conduct are monitored constantly. School leavers learn to mix with a range of age-groups/cultures in class.

Some modules in courses are specifically designed for the purpose of preparing students to enter the world of work, for example work environment, business communication, working in teams, job search, resume writing etc. Travel students are encouraged to join the Women's Australian Travel League (WATL) to network with professionals in the field.

Trainees

The Traineeship Co-ordinator liaises constantly with workplaces to ensure relevance of off-job training and to carry out workplace assessments. Trainees are already in the workplace doing

on-job training and, where staff are involved in workplace assessment, this enables them to remain current and to use workplace experiences in the classroom.

Support from peers

Staff explained that there is no formal organised peer support system. Formal peer support has been tried in the past and discarded because it didn't work well. Informally students tend to form relationships with others in their first modules and some come to college with friends from school. Teamwork/team-building is taught in some courses, and students often help each other with work and assignments.

Role and value of learner support

Availability of support

Learner support is largely integrated into the provision of training at Martin College. All learners have the opportunity to get to know the College Counsellor well during induction and as a teacher of some of the modules in their courses. Because of the one-to-one or small group teaching approach, individual attention and support is a daily occurrence and all students are interviewed regularly by the Dean of Students to ensure they are progressing and not experiencing problems. Importantly, all receive individual support without having to ask for it or actively identify needs, as they are being taught, assessed and supported as an individual throughout their course.

Support extends to job placement and beyond with many students taking advantage of staff expertise by ringing for assistance with workplace difficulties, such as books that won't balance or software questions, after they have successfully obtained employment.

While provision of support is ostensibly the same for part-time and full-time learners, the number of contact hours and fact that part-timers are often in full-time work, mean their problems may be taken elsewhere rather than brought to college staff in the same way as full-time students, and opportunities for follow-up may be less. Full-time students who gain employment before graduating can change to part-time attendance.

Evaluation forms are provided for every module completed and include evaluation of learner support.

Improvements suggested

Suggestions made by staff included:

- more staff of the same calibre as existing staff, including specialised staff for remedial work/slower students, and to teach basic skills including basic reading/writing/spelling/grammar/arithmetic and transition from school to college (bridging courses)
- a library with borrowing facilities (rather than just reference materials) located in the same building
- provision of a canteen with healthy food choices at reasonable prices
- class sets of textbooks for student use to overcome the problem that not all students buy books, especially for shorter modules, or the cost of books built into course fees and books given to students
- more social activities encouraging cross-cultural student interaction
- more field trips, for example, personal development classes in a nicer environment
- a peer mentoring program, pairing new students with experienced students

Suggestions made by students included:

- an on-site canteen selling healthy food at moderate prices, and/or a lunch room with microwave/cooking facilities
- a college nurse

- more computers/computer access time, especially for students living away from home who may not have other access to computers
- a library on-site and/or expanded library facilities

Conclusion

A major feature of learner support services offered at Martin College is their integration into the overall delivery of training so that students do not have to ask for help or be identified as 'in need' by teachers before getting individual assistance and support. This, together with the flexibility in module duration and individual attention from teachers ensures learners progress at their own pace.

Job search assistance was most commonly mentioned by students as the best form of support available at the college. Also mentioned were:

- the small group learning environment
- personal attention
- tutorial assistance
- the teachers who were friendly, approachable and available

The future of learning at Martin College

Flexible computer-based learning packages under development at Martin College will create new learner support needs and methods of provision as learners may learn at home or at a distance from a teacher.

Students will be assigned to facilitators, who may work from home, and, possibly, also to a study group or chat group. Contact points will be placed throughout modules, ensuring students maintain contact with facilitators and, in the future, study/chat groups, to complete module activities. A portfolio of assessable activities will be developed by students and assessed by facilitators/assessors and a major project will run through each module, developed progressively by the student, and based on their workplace where applicable or on case studies where learners are not employed.

This approach to learning has the potential to link learners across Martin College campuses, within Australia and overseas, to centralised resources and expertise.

At this stage it is impossible to guess whether this form of provision will replace traditional face-to-face delivery or become an alternative to it. It is likely that the need for learner support will increase with this form of provision.

Maxitrans, Ballarat

Introduction

The organisation

Maxitrans is a new company formed by the amalgamation of three smaller companies and has factories at Ballarat and Melbourne manufacturing semi-trailers, vans and heaters. Employee numbers at the Ballarat plant have increased from 190 to 430 in the last twelve months because of the amalgamation and increased growth.

Types of training discussed

This case study looked at training provided by the School of Mines Ballarat (SMB) which includes the Engineering Production Certificate, apprenticeships, traineeships and leadership and management courses run by private providers and equipment suppliers.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

The aim of training at Maxitrans is to provide on-the-job training to develop a group of qualified people who are able to teach others. Maxitrans prefers on-site training, customised to their needs, to sending people to a training provider. Many employees have had bad school experiences and they find on-site training less daunting. All the courses provided are award courses, so people can gain recognised qualifications. Most employees do not have formal qualifications and it gives them a real sense of achievement to gain them.

Maxitrans trainers and learners are often the same person. All Maxitrans trainers have undergone training, for example, the Engineering Production Certificate (EPC), leadership, management, in-house training courses.

Engineering Production Certificate

EPC is the base technical qualification provided. Each person determines his/her own progress, but has to complete eight of the 24 self-paced modules a year. The Quality Manager, who established the EPC on-site training, monitors employees' progress and talks with them if they fall behind.

An recognition of prior learning (RPL) process is used prior to the commencement of each module. A SMB teacher spends one day a week collecting work books for marking, handing back marked work, talking with learners, answering questions etc. The Line Co-ordinator or SMB teacher assesses practical work on-the-job and the SMB teacher marks the theory component and fills in the running sheet.

Learners reported that the module material is easy to work with. Learners ask people on the floor questions about the course, and line co-ordinators and technical officers are especially helpful. Learners reaction to doing the EPC included:

Doing the EPC gives me an incentive to work for the qualification and the chance to get to Trade level …

I have to do quite a bit of home work at night but it is worth it …

I do all the work at home but the module books are easy to understand …

I'm going to night school as well so as to get through more quickly …

Leadership and management

Courses undertaken on-site include Certificate III in Workplace Leadership, Certificate IV in Quality Management and Assurance and the Diploma in Management. All are customised to suit Maxitrans, and include relevant examples and assignments. RPL is given for relevant modules and courses completed.

SMB management teachers go to Maxitrans for three hrs a week at regular times. The sessions vary from one-to-one tutoring to tutorial groups. The employees have access to flexible learning classes at SMB for the computing modules. SMB teachers involved considered that the Diploma in Management in particular, works well with the support provided—enrolment is on-site, employees are provided with the module materials, tutorials are provided on-site, the style of delivery is negotiated between Maxitrans and SMB, the course suits Maxitran's needs and desired outcomes.

Learners find the weekly tutorials, where they discuss issues introduced in the modules, interesting and challenging. They all do the assignments at home and talk about problems and issues with the SMB teacher, Quality Manager, Human Resource Manager, line co-ordinators, and each other.

Traineeships

For the first few weeks trainees undertake full-time, self-paced training at Maxitrans in an area of the factory that has been set up as a training centre. SMB teachers come to the site one day a week to work with students. The SMB teacher assesses the off-the-job component, and the line co-ordinator or SMB teacher assess the on-the-job activities. The trainees complete 2 modules (80 hours) at SMB (for content not covered at Maxitrans) and 320 hours at Maxitrans. Their progress is formally evaluated monthly by the line co-ordinators, SMB teachers and mentors.

Each trainee is matched to a mentor. Mentors do not provide training, but trainees can talk about any type of problem with them. Mentors are paid $8 a week extra and are required to submit a monthly report on the trainee they are assisting.

Mentors receive a full day training program with a SMB teacher on communication, conflict resolution, expectations of mentors and trainees etc which they considered very useful. Some trainees present their mentors with considerable problems. One mentor commented that he needed help himself:

> *I needed help from other mentors (which I got) to be able to help the trainee. X helped me work out another approach with my trainee—which did work. The trainee did last the year and passed the traineeship and was kept on for another year—but he ended up leaving. I really felt that I had achieved something in helping him—but it was really hard.*

Another mentor had a good experience with the first trainee he mentored:

> *The trainee I had was really good, rapport was good, he asked questions and I was able to help him. It worked well. Mentors mentor each other and help each other and rely on the network to solve really difficult problems.*

Most trainees found that the mentors they were allocated to were good and gave them somebody to talk with and get help from.

Apprenticeships

Apprentice training is carried out in the same way as EPC and traineeships. Maxitrans is only involved in training second and third year apprentices, as all apprentices spend their first year as trainees. Apprentices spend 80 hours at SMB at night (for the content that cannot be covered at Maxitrans, for example, pressure vessel welding) and 240 hours at Maxitrans.

The program is guided self-paced. Most of the assessments are carried out at the workplace by SMB teachers. The apprentices are rotated through the lines every 4 months to give them exposure to different work and different line co-ordinators. The apprentices are evaluated monthly by their line co-ordinators and the SMB teachers.

Most apprentices doing training at Maxitrans commented that it was difficult, and time consuming, to find the SMB teacher (to ask assistance or get an activity assessed) in the very large, seven-acre factory. They often do not get time to finish the job in the time allotted because of these difficulties.

If work is busy apprentices can be prevented from attending training or spending the whole day on training. If this happens often they are allocated a block of several days training to make up the lost time.

Line co-ordinators and technical officers

Line co-ordinators, technical officers and the Quality Manager identify the training needs of people on the line, using the skills matrix. Both casual and permanent people receive training, as training is determined on a needs basis rather than on people's status. Line co-ordinators monitor all of the people on the line and those who show initiative are provided opportunities. Casuals can do the EPC training.

Line co-ordinators and technical officers are responsible for training people on the line (mostly on the standard operating procedures). Line co-ordinators work closely with technical officers as, with the large increase in numbers of people in the factory, there is a tremendous need for training to ensure new people know their jobs and can operate effectively and safely.

VET-in-Schools

In this program students spend two days at school, one day at SMB and two days at Maxitrans. This program is harder to manage than traineeships or apprenticeships as the students are only on-site two days a week and line co-ordinators do not consider the students an important responsibility.

OH&S training

OH&S training has a high priority. The OH&S Officer conducts training on a train-the-trainer basis with line co-ordinators and technical officers.

EEO and affirmative action

Training is conducted by the Human Resources Manager on a train-the-trainer basis with line co-ordinators, technical officers, production managers and office managers.

Incentives

The Quality Manager, Human Resources Manager, line co-ordinators and production mangers encourage people to do training, inquire how they are going and recognise their success. Incentives provided by the company include:

- Training for EPC, apprentices, trainees, and some leadership courses are provided in work time. Maxitrans arranges for the SMB teachers to deliver on-site, pays fees, buys books etc.
- For most leadership and management courses, the company reimburses course fees to employees when they pass each module. Fifty per cent of course attendance is in company time and 50% is in the employees' time.
- The wages of trainees and apprentices reflect the number of competencies they achieve.
- When people finish EPC they are at trade level (C10) and are paid accordingly.
- The company reimburses fees for some specialist courses (for example, first aid, brakes), attendance is in work time, and the company pays travel costs.

Learners considered that Maxitrans provided them with tremendous opportunities for training, and supported them very well during their training. Most learners appreciated the opportunity to gain formal qualifications, and this provided a strong incentive. Trainees and apprentices were motivated to complete the competencies in order to gain increased pay.

> *The training concept at Maxitrans is good. We get lots of opportunities we would not have had otherwise. It's the best place I've worked at.*

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

The company accepts poor reading and writing skills if people can do their job on the line. About 20% of employees are thought to have literacy problems. Line co-ordinators help people with literacy problems and make sure everybody can understand issues and problems that arise. However, people have to be literate to participate in the paper-based, self-paced training.

Personal/emotional problems

The Human Resources Manager conducts training in counselling in industrial relations and people issues for line co-ordinators. Line co-ordinators are in the position to monitor people on their line and are often the first point of call for people with problems. If line co-ordinators can not help, they usually suggest the person talks with the Human Resources Manager. The Human Resources Manager can arrange for specialist external help if required.

Support for job seeking/career development

Learners recounted how people are frequently nominated for training, or asked if they want to do a specific training course. Sometimes the person asked had never considered there would be the opportunity, or that they had the ability to do the training suggested. They are usually asked by their line co-ordinator or the Quality Manager.

Skills matrix

The skills matrix is a part of the Maxitrans ISO 9000 quality system. Each line has its own skills matrix which provides information to the line co-ordinators on the skills required on the line and the competencies of their people.

Every three to four months, the Quality Manager, in consultation with the Production Managers and line co-ordinators, analyses the skills matrix and identifies the gaps. The line co-ordinators decide how many people are needed with which specific skills, and what people should receive training in the skills. The Quality Manager and Human Resource Manager organise the training.

Support of trainers

The Human Resources Manager and the Quality Manager help on-the-job trainers. The Site Manager is also very supportive of training and the development of people. Management, in particular, aims to help people who have been in the same job for a long time and appear to be 'stuck'.

SMB teachers need to be coached, nurtured and trained to do the type of teaching being provided at Maxitrans. It is a very different type of teaching for many TAFE teachers. Some teachers completed assessor and advanced assessor training that helped them adapt to industry-based teaching. One teacher was involved in the *Investment in excellence* and *Framing the future* programs which he found helped him adapt to working in industry.

Support in understanding workplace culture

Induction

Induction of a new operator on the line takes about 1–1½ hours. They are introduced to the site, their line co-ordinator and work mates, and provided with a 'buddy' who teaches them their first job. When they are thoroughly familiar with the job they begin to be rotated through all of the jobs on the line. A new person is rotated through each process and at each stage is put with a qualified person who instructs them in the process until they are sufficiently multi-skilled to be rotated through all the jobs on the line with the rest of the work group.

Trainees spend the first day being inducted into the company, OH&S and their training program. They spend the first four weeks at the training centre, where they learn basic skills before being put onto the line. While in the training centre they build a trailer as a mini-project which they work on from beginning to end, helping them to understand how the factory works.

Support from peers

Each line, which is largely self-managed, is divided into work groups or teams. A work group is made up of the 15–20 people who work on a trailer together. A lot of tutoring of technical skills goes on within the work group. Generally people work well together and help each other. Most people in the work group feel a sense of ownership for each project they work on. Work group meetings take place for about one hour every month to discuss issues, problems, OH&S and training. Sometimes training, especially in OH&S, takes place in the work group meeting.

Role and value of learner support

Most people interviewed would not have done training without the support provided by Maxitrans. Many of them would not have considered that they were capable of successfully completing the training and gaining the qualifications that they now have.

Some people said that they could never have afforded the training that had been provided for them by Maxitrans. All were very appreciative of the opportunities Maxitrans had provided them

Responsibility for providing and seeking support

Trainers feel that employees have the responsibility to volunteer and take every opportunity provided. Learners considered that it was up to them to volunteer for training and to ask for support when they need it.

Improvements suggested

Although the trainers and learners interviewed considered that Maxitrans provided a very good training environment, they suggested a number of improvements, including:

- More training should be offered to office people as most of the training is provided for people on the floor.
- Some learners found that they could not get enough help with their modules, especially at the beginning of the training and were not given enough guidance.
- Some learners considered that insufficient time is allocated for training in the leadership course, as there is often not enough time to go into things in depth.
- Some learners found it very hard to return to study after many years and need more support.
- Some learners considered that it would be better to go to SMB for training. If there are problems on the line, they are taken away from the class. They felt that it was difficult to concentrate on the training in these circumstances.
- Some apprentices thought that the training was too narrow, as they were being trained to work at Maxitrans rather than gain a trade.

Conclusion

Maxitrans has developed a training partnership with SMB. The company and the training provider have worked through the problems and difficulties that have arisen which has strengthened the partnership.

Maxitrans places a high priority on training and demonstrates its investment in its people in a practical, concrete way. Employees recognise this commitment and appreciate what the company has provided them.. Employees at all levels of the organisation are provided with support that encourages and enables them to undertake training. Many people, with low expectations of their own ability, have gained nationally recognised qualifications.

Comments from learners about their training experiences include:

I've done a lot of training—all provided by Maxitrans—and now have a good resume and very broad skills.

As a woman in the office I really felt good about being asked by the Quality Manager if I would like to do a Diploma in Management.

I have done so much training (Management, EPC, First Aid, OH&S) that has given me formal qualifications that I never thought I would get. As well, I did a number of short in-house courses on things like industrial drawing and manual handling.

Maxitrans has given us a lot and we are really loyal and dedicated—we are on 24 hour call voluntarily. They show they trust us and we repay it with our loyalty.

Managing people is difficult. The leadership course I did has helped me with my line co-ordinator job. I am using the skills I learnt (like time management, organisational skills and conflict resolution) everyday.

Southcorp Wines, Victoria

Introduction

The organisation

Southcorp Wines in the town of Great Western (Victoria) is the sparkling wine processing site of Southcorp Wines Pty Ltd. The site employs 180 people in an operation that goes from grape to sparkling wine. This site produces 130 different products, that together make up 50% of Australian sparkling wine.

Types of training discussed

Southcorp Wines is involved in a wide range of formal and informal training. The case study focussed on the Certificate in Food Processing and training in standard operating procedures.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

Establishing a training culture

Southcorp Wines, Great Western is committed to training and is working to establish a training culture, which will encompass all levels of management and staff at the site. Importantly, the parent company, Southcorp Wines Pty Ltd is also committed to training. This is essential as senior managers rotate through the different Southcorp sites. The organisation acknowledges that the development of a training culture will take time to establish, and has embarked on a three to five year structured approach.

All formal training is competency-based, linked to a nationally accredited qualification, documented on individual training passports and linked to individual reward (pay increases, promotion and recognition).

Southcorp Wines, Great Western uses a number of providers; all are evaluated by the participants and reviewed for performance at least annually.

Informal on-the-job training (for example on the standard operating procedures) is provided by the company.

Trainers and learners are indistinguishable as all trainers are also learners, and a number of learners are also trainers. All the trainers have undergone training.

- Most have completed the National Trainer Certificate 1.
- Many are undertaking or have completed the Certificate in Food Processing.
- Many have completed training in at least one of the large number of specific skills Southcorp Wines needs (for example, fork lift driving, post trade courses run by machinery suppliers and training providers, etc).
- Some are involved in the Southcorp Leadership program.

Availability of training

Training is widely available and is advertised through notices, memos and the newsletter. People volunteer and are accepted for training if it is relevant to their work and it is considered that they would benefit from it. The Southcorp Wines' ISO 9000 system stipulates that all requests for training must be documented, filed and responded to. Not all learners' training requests are granted and it may take some time before they actually start the course. Learners consider that their supervisors and the Training Co-ordinator really encourage them to do training.

Training on standard operating procedures (SOPs)

SOP training is the basic 'glue' of the training system. There is a SOP for each of the site's processes. SOPs have a basic step-by-step format, are easy to read and are expressed in simple language and diagrams. They are developed by the area responsible for the work, which also regularly revises and updates them. The SOPs form the organisation's ISO 9000, ISO 1400 and OH&S systems. Training is, therefore, totally integrated into the structure of the organisation.

All new employees are trained on the SOPs they will be working to. New employees are provided with the SOP and are allocated a mentor (or buddy) who demonstrates how to do the job and answers questions. The supervisor monitors the new employee's progress. Learners reported that the 'buddy system' generally works, but most of the lines need more trained people to really make it work. In areas where there is a high turn-over of casual staff, considerable time is spent on training, which can be insufficiently thorough.

Certificate in Food Processing

The certificate is the base qualification for most people on the site. The certificate is provided on site under contract from a TAFE college, which customises and contextualises the modules to suit activities carried out at Southcorp Wines, Great Western. The course is provided in self-paced mode with TAFE teachers coming to the site for four hours every fortnight to support the learners' off-the-job training (go over problems and issues, answer questions etc). Company trainers and assessors provide the on-the-job training and assessments.

Learners work through the self-paced manual at their own pace and ask the TAFE teacher or people on the floor for help when they need it. Almost all of the people on the floor are quite willing to help and the TAFE teachers are helpful. Learners like the self-paced mode and regard it as the only practical way of doing training in work hours. Most learners would not have started the course if it had not been organised for them in this way. They considered the module manuals easy to work with. The course requires the learners to do their own research (which many enjoy), and many of them do some work at home.

Assistance with problems and answers to questions

Learners have little difficulty gaining support from the people in the team they work with. If the team cannot provide the help needed, they all feel that they can ask the Training Co-ordinator, who will help if he can or find the answer for them. A grape receival officer commented:

> *I ask questions all the time and people answer—they are good about it.*

Mentors

Mentors are operators nominated by supervisors to train and support new employees. The aim is that all mentors should have completed National Trainer Certificate 1.

Training passport

A training passport concept is being developed across Southcorp Wines Pty Ltd. The passport will list all training each employee has done and will facilitate their transfer within and across Southcorp sites. The passport information will be provided on-line on the company's intranet as well as a 'hard copy', and will be added to corporate human resource records.

Integration of on-and-off-the-job training

All training provided on site is totally integrated with the work people are doing. The modules of the Food Production Certificate are contextualised and customised to ensure they are integrated. Some training is also provided off-site and is paid for by Southcorp Wines as long as it is required on the job. People undertaking this training are expected to use the training when they return.

Determining training needs

Supervisors are expected to observe and monitor the people in their area. If someone is failing or having problems the supervisor talks with the Training Co-ordinator about whether extra training would solve the problem. Literacy and numeracy problems are identified by supervisors, TAFE teachers and the Training Co-ordinator. Supervisors determine training priorities within their training budgets. They have to ensure that newly trained people put their new skills and knowledge into practice and share the learning gained with the rest of the team.

A multiskills chart is used to identify training needs and monitor participation in training. Each work area has a multiskills chart, which is displayed in a location that is convenient to everybody in the area. All of the skills required in the department or line and their acquisition by the people in the work area are listed. As people attend training and gain skills it is updated.

The identification of training needs is also built into the quality management system. New equipment, structural changes, major problems etc require the completion of a change management form, which includes the identification of training needs resulting from the change.

Performance reviews identify training and support needs for salaried staff. Staff discuss training and support needs at their team (Toolbox) meeting.

Incentives

Financial incentives

Every employee who has worked for Southcorp for 1000 hours, whether permanent or casual, is entitled to study a certificate that is relevant to their work (for example, secretarial, management, food processing, computing) with Southcorp Wines support.

Southcorp pays all employees according to the level of competencies they have achieved, up to the metals C6 level (or its equivalent). This can mean that employees are paid at a higher competency level than their jobs require. For many learners interviewed, increased wages was the most powerful incentive for them to undertake training and work up the competencies.

Opportunities

Another commonly mentioned reason for doing training was that it added to the interest and understanding of their jobs. One learner recounted how he had visited other wineries during training and had learnt how they make wine, adding to his knowledge of the industry and understanding of his job.

Some staff had undertaken training at night in their own time and Southcorp Wines paid the fees. Tradespeople interviewed were appreciative of the opportunity they had been given to upgrade their skills. Many of them had not had this opportunity before.

A person on the line did training:

> *... to keep the brain ticking—working on the line is very repetitive.*

Many learners spoke of the sense of achievement they had from successfully completing training. They had not had the opportunity of doing training or gaining qualifications before going to Southcorp Wines. They now had formal qualifications and had marketable skills. One learner explained:

> *I have done all the training I can do (train-the-trainer, assessor, safety officer etc). It makes me a better worker. I have more insight into what's going on and I can read people better.*

Many learners mentioned that all the training offered made them more loyal to Southcorp. The company makes them feel valued by the way they look after them when undergoing external training. They are provided with good accommodation if training is away from home, training and travel is in work time, and a car is supplied if it is needed.

Incentives and support for trainers

In order to create the training culture for which Southcorp Wines is striving, incentives must also be provided to encourage people to become trainers. Trainers were very positive about their training experiences. Some of the comments about being trainers included:

> *Training teaches you about the industry and gives more meaning to the work ...*
>
> *Makes you care more ...*
>
> *Makes you look at Southcorp in a better light ...*

A fork lift driving trainer travels to training (when conducted on other sites) in work time, is provided with good accommodation, gets a car if needed, and receives $20 extra a week for providing training. For a SOP trainer, training duties are incorporated into his job and are not an 'add on'.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

People with poor literacy skills enrol in 'report writing' and attend classes in work time. As with all training, people attend voluntarily, but are encouraged to enrol if there appears to be a need. A TAFE teacher comes to the site every Tuesday morning to help people with their literacy problems. Most teaching is one-to-one as people are often too embarrassed about their literacy problems to work in a group. Sometimes they just need to work on spelling, punctuation or written language. An example was given of a person who is being groomed for internal promotion and needs to improve her written language skills. She is working with the literacy teacher in work time and getting assistance, prior to taking up the new job.

Personal/emotional problems

The counsellor from the Australian Interchurch Trade and Industry Mission comes to the site weekly for about two hours (at Southcorp Wines expense), and is also available after hours. He provides counselling help on-site on work related and non-work related issues. Southcorp

Wines is located in the small town of Great Western and is closely connected to the town. Any problems that happen at work reverberate through the community and vice versa.

He is in a good position to provide a 'sounding board' (not being a part of Southcorp) and is seen to provide an impartial, confidential service. His availability is advertised throughout the plant on notice boards, at Toolbox meetings, the newsletter etc. He gives a monthly report to management on what he has been doing (without any names). The report is a good barometer on the organisation (OH&S, morale, interrelationships etc).

Support for job seeking/career development

Performance reviews

Personal development reviews, which all salaried employees undertake annually, look at training needs and career development. People can plan a career within Southcorp and undertake training relevant to the site or Southcorp generally. Casual and part-time staff have annual meetings with their supervisor to discuss their progress, training needs and future directions. However, this can be difficult to achieve because of the rotation of casual staff.

Multiskills chart

The chart lists each person against the skills the department needs-and identifies training gaps. The charts are displayed in each work area so people can monitor their own progress. When a person feels confident they ask to be assessed for their proficiency in the skills.

Learners' comments

The availability of career development support largely depends on where people work. People working on a line find it difficult to obtain other, more interesting jobs. In the winery there are opportunities to go to other sites, as an exchange or to back-fill positions, which adds to people's knowledge and interest. Fork-lift drivers have the opportunity to work on other sites. One person (a casual employee) had worked out the type of job she wanted and applied to do the appropriate training in order to get it:

> *I volunteered for a fork-lift driving course so I could be a grape receiving officer. I was on the line. I knew where I wanted to work and I knew what courses I needed to do to get that position. I really like what I am doing in grape receiving. It is outside, meeting people, and it's very busy from February to May and I like that. I am a long-term casual but still got the training I needed.*

Support in understanding workplace culture

Induction

Southcorp Wines, Great Western regards the induction process as being very important as it introduces the new employee to the company and how it operates. There are really three levels of induction: the company induction, the department induction and the job/position induction. Trainers felt that it is crucial that these three inductions are effective. The people interviewed thought that the inductions were very supportive and comprehensive. The first few days on the job generally work well, as people are helped by their mentor (buddy).

Mentors

Mentors or 'buddies' provide one-to-one training of new people and casuals on SOPs and introduce them to the workplace culture.

Support from peers

Each line operates as a team, as people generally help each other and work together. Each line holds monthly Toolbox meetings to carry out basic training, discuss problems, issues and improvements.

Role and value of learner support

Trainers and learners felt that most people would not do training without the support provided by Southcorp Wines. Trainers felt that it would be a very difficult to get staff trained if the infrastructure and the culture of support established by the Training Co-ordinator was not in place, and management was not supportive. Most learners were very appreciative of the training opportunities available at Southcorp Wines and enthusiastic about their training opportunities.

Responsibility for providing and seeking support

Both trainers and learners considered that both the workplace and the individual have roles to play. The company provides a counsellor, a literacy teacher and a training co-ordinator and organises appropriate training programs to enable employees to do the training and get the support they need. Individuals volunteer and need to be sufficiently motivated to apply themselves and complete the course. Learners also considered it important that supervisors and managers talk with their people about the training they are doing and encourage them to do training One learner said:

> *It's our responsibility, not just the company's. We all need to make the training work. If there are problems with some people on the line having difficulty getting time off, we should all sit around the table and solve the problems.*

Improvements suggested

While both trainers and learners were appreciative of the opportunities for training provided by their employer, they also discussed a number of improvements that, if implemented, would make training at Southcorp Wines even better. These include:

- Management training should be provided for supervisors. Their skills need to be enhanced and they are often the last to be offered training.
- SOP training should be more thorough. There is very expensive, complex equipment at Southcorp Wines, Great Western and accidents and mistakes can happen and cause huge problems.
- There should be formal follow up of leadership courses to see if there are any changes in the people who attended.
- Many people who have done the assessor training have not been able to do assessments.
- People who do not get accepted for courses should be told the reason

Conclusion

Southcorp Wines has taken a policy decision to establish a training culture. Most of the trainers and learners (often the same people) understood this policy direction and applauded it. Training can also have what some managers see as a negative effect, as it increases the awareness and assertiveness of employees, who question things and may complain more.

The people interviewed were both aware and assertive, and very positive about working at Southcorp wines, Great Western. While all of them were appreciative of the opportunities Southcorp Wines had provided them, they were also quick to point out a number of improvements to the training system that should be considered.

Trainers and learners interviewed identified a numbered of 'best support experiences'.

- Many people saw that the Training Co-ordinator had a pivotal role in the provision of training and support for trainers and learners at Southcorp Wines, Great Western.
- The ability to undertake the Food Production Certificate, with TAFE teachers coming to the site to help people with the modules.
- The opportunity to undertake the National Trainer Certificate 1 and assessor training.
- The support given to people to attend external courses.

- The feelings of a number of people interviewed is aptly summed up in the following quote from one of the interviewees:

  The training has opened up all sorts of things that we would not have thought about.

Stuut's of Sydney Hairdressing Salon, NSW

Introduction

The organisation

This hairdressing salon has survived and prospered for thirty years in Pennant Hills under the control of the owner/operator Burt Stuut. It is located close to several other salons challenging its market share but has maintained a consistent client base in this competitive industry.

Types of training discussed

Discussions included in-salon training and off-job training provided by TAFE colleges for hairdressing apprentices.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

In the salon learning is supported by:

- magazines and trade journals including product suppliers' magazines, Professional Hairdressing Association magazines and national fashion magazines
- colouring books and procedures manuals to help staff work through procedures
- visits from product suppliers and other hair artists from around Sydney provide demonstrations two or three times a year
- product suppliers' updates on product knowledge at breakfast or evening meetings, product launches and demonstrations, or regular supplier demonstrations of products
- a training evening once a week, varied so that it is relevant to different staff
- mannequins (dummy head with hair) used in the salon to perfect specific techniques during quieter periods
- live models used on salon training evenings
- staff are sent out as 'mystery shoppers' to other shops, small businesses or hair salons to observe the standards of customer service and experience service from the customer perspective as a way of improving their own standards of customer service

The apprentices added that their major form of assistance comes from senior staff in the salon. Some apprentices experience more difficulty balancing on and off-job study with work than others. Apprentices feel the level of workplace support they receive is very high and that they would experience more problems with learning and work without it.

Incentives

Hairdressing is a competitive and creative industry and the spirit of competition is fostered in the salon so all staff have a strong desire to do well. Incentives include:

- sales targets
- salon competitions with prizes including, for example, a weekend in Coffs Harbour
- occasionally being 'thrown into' something unexpected to maintain interest

- industry competitions
- attending hair shows
- 'I've always loved hairdressing'
- 'Hairdressing is something you do because you love it'

According to the owner an important aspect of managing a small team of this type is to focus on the positives and ensure staff do not dwell on any negative aspects of work or personalities. 'Individuals are motivated by different things, so it is important to change the incentives regularly to maintain enthusiasm.' Staff feedback is encouraged to foster continuous improvement, and regular meetings are held.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

For apprentices attending TAFE courses, the usual forms of assistance are available for any problems with basic literacy, numeracy or science in the form of TAFE tutorials.

Personal/emotional problems

The salon owner and the manager explained that teamwork is important in the salon and all staff are friends, so inevitably learn about each other's problems and make allowances for each other when necessary, or if targets set are not met. However, it is essential that problems are not aired in front of customers.

The apprentices agreed that behaving professionally in the salon was important and said:

> *We don't discuss personal problems at work, but Burt is very helpful with personal problems and we can talk to him out of work.*
>
> *We're more likely to handle personal problems outside of work rather than bring them to work.*
>
> *It's good here because everyone is very close and we are all friends so there is always someone here who can help you with some sort of support.*

Support in understanding workplace culture

The team-based culture of the workplace is fostered by the management style, encouragement of regular feedback, and also by occasional activities outside work, such as an excursion to the Blue Mountains for some team orienteering.

A common recruitment practice is to ask applicants to come in and work for a day in the salon to see how well they fit in with the team and whether they are able to use their initiative in doing what needs to be done.

Once employed, the introduction to the workplace and duties is managed by the use of an induction checklist. The checklist is regularly changed and upgraded as new skills are learned, approximately every two or three weeks.

Support from peers

As the salon has a small number of staff, and a happy team environment, formal peer support is not organised. New members of the team are supervised closely by the salon manager, but can ask questions of all members of staff and are generally helped by everyone. The apprentices remarked on the good rapport shared by all staff.

Role and value of learner support

In this workplace, learner support is fully integrated as part of everyday operations and impossible to separate from general employee support. All staff take responsibility for helping apprentices and each other. While much of this support is informal, that is, not based on

written procedures, there is also considerable structure in salon-based training and incentives which help ensure high levels of performance.

Improvements suggested

The owner, manager and apprentices were all asked what improvements they could suggest 'given an ideal world and unlimited budget'. The owner and manager suggested:

- changes to the NSW TAFE curriculum to provide more individually planned training for apprentices would be an improvement. This could include both flexibility in duration of training and also tailoring training more to the strengths and weaknesses of individuals rather than providing a 'smattering of everything'
- 'More time to spend with individuals'

The apprentices suggested:

- 'More money would be good, but otherwise everything is provided'
- 'Opportunities to meet famous hairdressers and watch them, and opportunities to go to seminars and to go overseas to train'
- 'Nothing—the job is its own reward'

Conclusion

The overall impression gained from discussions at Stuut's of Sydney is of a very friendly and highly professional salon, where high standards are expected and fostered and staff are given every opportunity to develop their skills to their potential.

The apprentices nominated as the best aspects of the support available:

- the friendly atmosphere and the fact everybody is willing to help; the fact that help is always available and training is organised one-to-one and tailored to the individual
- opportunities to undertake a variety of work and learn a great deal and get lots of experience
- 'We all get along so well'

It is clear that, after thirty successful years in the business, the salon owner is still willing to continually strive for improvement and try new ways of supporting and motivating staff. He believes that any incentive has a shelf life and there is a constant need for new challenges and rewards to keep staff interested and improving. The Salon Manager shares this enthusiasm by tailoring training to suit individual needs and ensuring opportunities for regular feedback and problem solving are organised to maintain the continued smooth-running of salon operations. Both are aware of the importance of a motivated and skilled team working happily together for a healthy business.

Torrens Valley Institute—Tea Tree Gully Campus, South Australia

Introduction

The organisation

The Tea Tree Gully Campus of Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE was opened in 1992.

Types of training discussed

Tea Tree Gully specialises in self-paced training. This case study discusses the support provided to students undertaking self-paced study in electronics, hair and beauty and the practice firm.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

Self-paced

The experiences of the electronics program area illustrates how self-paced instruction has been established. The electronics program area:

- started with the new college, which enabled staff to develop the mode of delivery and the course materials, the software management system and design the open plan electronic laboratories
- has found that one of the most important elements in the success of the approach is the mind-set of the staff. The staff teach the students how to learn, rather than teach the content to the students. Staff must feel confident about having students doing many different things at the same time in the laboratory
- has found that successful self-paced delivery depends on having quality teaching materials, effective software management system and computer network, staff dedication, the right mix of staff knowledge and skills, attitude of the staff, and above all communication between students and staff involved

Electronics students are encouraged to work on more than one module at a time. This is especially important for the purely theory modules like mathematics as they can alternate theory and practical modules to maintain motivation. As the resources are computer based, students can log-on from home to work on a module

Learning resource centres

Learning resource centres (LRCs), which are mini-libraries, are located close to each program area and hold the resources needed for the courses offered. The LRC is an extension of the classroom and people move in and out, according to the needs of the modules of the courses studied. The LRC staff work closely with the program areas they support.

LRC staff run orientation programs for most program areas. LRC staff assist individuals or groups of students who need help finding resources. The LRC staff often run advanced searching sessions, based on a particular assignment or module, with the specific teacher involved.

The Hair and Beauty LRC has demonstrations on video and students can use them if they are having problems, need extra practice or have been away. Students can borrow videos, manikins, books, handouts and use the internet. All students, especially trainees and pre-vocational students use their LRC heavily and find that it is very useful.

The Practice Firm LRC has reference material the course needs. Students do not need to refer to the LRC a great deal as the module is relatively self-contained. Students can get information from the LRC if they are away or do not understand a particular aspect.

Orientation to self-paced study

All program areas run orientations and information sessions that include an introduction to self-paced learning.

The Hair and Beauty Course Co-ordinators run an information session for pre-vocational students at the beginning of their 12 month course. As apprentices have rolling enrolments, the course co-ordinators run four to six information sessions per year on a needs basis. The information sessions cover the course (competency-based training, the LRC, self-paced arrangements, assessments) and student services available on the campus. Students found the information sessions realistic and helpful.

Electronics runs similar information sessions. The first electronics module (40 hour nominal duration) is on self-managed learning. There are group sessions and self-paced activities to introduce them to the way the modules and courses run. Students all do this module at their own pace and take varying amounts of time on it. This module is critical to the success of the students and the courses.

Student Services also runs information sessions before students enrol and orientation programs after enrolment, which help students adapt to self-paced delivery. They also stress the availability of student services to provide assistance. People returning to study after some years, particularly women, are reported to need a lot of help.

Student views on self-paced mode

All the hair and beauty students liked the self-paced mode. The reasons include:

> *Self-paced is great as we can move ahead in the areas we find easy and spend more time on the areas we find difficult—then you can get the extra help you may need.*
>
> *Can always ask the teachers for help after class. Can ring teachers too.*
>
> *I like to move through the course as quickly as I can.*

Electronics students' comments about the self-paced mode include:

> *It's good to know that I could be here from 8.30am to 9.00pm if I need to. I have all the time I need to get on top of the material.*
>
> *If you are sick it enables you to catch up. You can easily drop out and come back in and you don't really fall behind as you determine the pace anyway.*
>
> *You can vary the length of time you spend on various modules and build up specialties and advanced studies in the areas you are particularly interested in.*

The teaching environment

Each hair and beauty class has a diverse range of students—first, second and third year apprentices and pre-vocational all working at their own pace on their modules.

In the electronics laboratories there are usually 5–6 teachers with up to 100 students at any one time (usually a 1:18 teacher student ratio). There is always a teacher in the laboratory who can answer questions. Formal lessons only occur when a group of students does not understand a particular topic and the lecturer calls them aside and gives a short lesson.

However, electronics has found that the teaching of manual skills (for example, soldering) is more difficult in self-paced mode, so tutorials are offered at regular times. This is the only module that has this type of restriction. (By contrast, hair and beauty practical skills are covered in self-paced mode.)

In the practice firm (a simulated business) the teacher takes students through the initial task-sheet, asking pertinent questions about the tasks and making sure the students know what to do and where to start. The task sheets use holistic assessment.

Providing and seeking help

Hair and beauty teachers identify most support needs. Some students identify their own support needs, but many do not want to show their peers that they need help. Hair and beauty students feel that there are a lot of people they can ask for help: their teachers, the Course Co-ordinator and the LRC staff. They commented that:

> *... we become friends with our teachers and they are always very helpful.*

Electronics student mentors monitor their students' progress and offer help when it is needed. Students initially ask for help, but they usually find that the modules are very clear and they do not need a great deal of help. If a student asks for help there is always a staff member available to assist on a one-on-one basis.

The practice firm teacher identifies needs by monitoring students' progress and offering help when she feels they need it. She stresses that it is important not to intervene too soon, as the students are learning to work together, help each other, and become independent learners.

Practice firm students need a lot of help initially. They go to the teacher constantly at the beginning of the year, but after five to six weeks they are starting to work out most things for themselves and are asking each other for help. Some students need help with very basic skills.

Support structures

In hair and beauty, lecturers and the Course Co-ordinator provide most of the support.

In electronics, each module has a facilitator, who is responsible for developing the module, keeping it up-to-date, marking assessments and mentoring the students in that content area.

Each Electronics student has a mentor assigned to them, who meets with them every two weeks. At the meeting they talk about how they are going with the course and any problems they may be having (with the course or in general). The mentor monitors their students' progress. Students who do not see their mentor for over two weeks, without prior arrangement, are locked out of the computer system and have to see their mentor to re-enter.

The role of the practice firm teacher is like a supervisor at work: she is there to see the work gets done, monitor the running of the departments, give help where needed and provide the human resource functions.

Resources

Electronics considers that high-quality written materials, computer software, the software management system and assessment tasks are vital for the success of self-paced delivery. They do not just teach the electronics content, but problem-solving, learning, working in a team as the key competencies are written into the materials and software. Each module has a nominal time it is expected to take to complete. The computer management system monitors how long students take to do each module. If a student is very slow, their mentor, who monitors progress, offers assistance.

As the practice firm is like a business with a number of different departments, a procedures manual has been developed. When a student goes into each department they first must read the procedures manual that tells them how the department functions. They then get out the task sheet for that department and work through it, using the procedures manual as a reference.

Differences between part-time and full-time students

As Hair and beauty apprentices are at college for only one day a week, it is more difficult for them to access support when they need it. Often when part-time students attend college in the evening, there is only one teacher in attendance so it is very difficult for them to get additional support.

LRC staff find that most part-time students look for less support than full-time students, although some part-time students need a lot of support

Student Services mainly see day-time students (either part or full-time) as evening students find it hard to access their services. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that many evening-class teachers are contract or casual staff, who often do not know about the availability of student services.

External students have the least access to learner support. Frequently they do not find out about the additional support available and often they can only get help by phone.

Integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training

Hair and beauty teachers identified that there can be some conflict for students, as at work students are directed but at college they mainly make their own decisions in the self-paced program. Hair and beauty students talked about how their employers and TAFE teachers discussed what they should learn at college. Students appreciated the learning conditions that are provided at TAFE:

> *In pre-voc I really learnt skills well as at TAFE everything is marked off—it is very thorough. On the job there's not time to mark everything off. TAFE helps give you lots of little techniques and tricks of the trade.*

Incentives

The main incentive for students was the successful completion of their course. They all wanted the formal qualifications, which they expected would assist them gain employment. Students also commented on the value of their work experience in helping them gain employment or apprenticeships.

Students commented on the value of the self-paced mode in assisting them become independent, motivated learners.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

Learner support services provide English language skills, numeracy and literacy support on a one-to-one basis or in small groups depending on the need. The majority of people learn the skills they need or gain sufficient confidence to terminate the support within a semester.

Learner support staff also work with faculty staff, assisting them develop learning materials and assessment tools that are clear and easily understood.

Electronics teachers have found that people with limited English can have difficulties with the technical language and terminology. The staff give them more one-to-one support than usual, peer tutoring can be provided, and one-to-one assistance is provided by student services.

Personal/emotional problems

Hair and beauty teachers provide personal counselling out of class time. As the teachers have a good relationship with the students, they are usually the first people approached. Hair and beauty staff do most of the personal counselling and only refer them on to the campus counsellor when it is appropriate. Students feel well cared for and do not feel 'fobbed off' with this approach. If necessary a teacher will take a student to the counsellor. The teacher involved will check up on how they are going once they have seen the counsellor.

The hair and beauty program area has developed formal procedure for counselling sessions. Documentation is important; with the lack of continuity of staff (casual staff, different teachers and co-ordinators involved) there must be notes so that staff know what has happened and act accordingly.

Electronics staff mentor the students and assist them with most personal and social problems. If the staff can not help, they refer the student to the counsellor, medical help etc.

The practice firm teacher usually listens and refers them to the counsellor or student services if she thinks it is necessary.

Student need for help from the campus counsellors depends on how much support they receive from within their program area. The increase in casual and seasonal staff has seen an increase in the counsellors' load. Students who are identified as 'at risk' early can be provided

with alternative study programs, which ease them into the course of their choice. Counsellors are invited to participate in program area orientation sessions.

Disabilities

The hair and beauty program area provides support for students with disabilities on a needs basis. This can involve specialist equipment, an alternative delivery style, different handout format, etc.

A deaf electronics student is provided with an interpreter for 15 hours a week and his mentor has learnt signing. He commented that the staff are good, as they help him and encourage him. He gets a lot of help from his mentor, with whom he initially spent a considerable period of time. His interpreter worked with the counsellor on developing this deaf student's time management and study skills.

The practice firm lecturer provides support for students with disabilities on a needs basis.

Other support

LRC staff become familiar with the program areas and build up a good knowledge of the way the program is delivered, assignments, modules that cause problems and idiosyncrasies of the teachers, and have a detailed knowledge of the resources used by the program.

Library staff are generally skilled at helping people with disabilities and students with limited English. There is a lot of cross referral of students with special needs, between library, student services and faculty staff. A LRC staff member looks after equipment for people with disabilities, maintaining a record of all the aids and special support material, and distributing it to all the other campuses when it is needed.

Support for job seeking/career development

Employment services

All students can access an employment officer until 6 months after finishing their course. Services provided by the employment service include:

- resume preparation—individually, in small groups and in classes
- preparing people for interviews—mostly one-to-one
- providing special help to students with disabilities
- showing students how to research for jobs
- career guidance
- assisting students gain casual or part-time employment while studying, or full-time employment
- referring students to other organisations like Employment National (which also refers people to the employment service)
- registering positions available
- maintaining a data base of job seekers and businesses looking for employees
- participating in orientation sessions run by various program areas
- distributing flyers and posters advertising the service
- networking with lecturers throughout the institute to ensure they tell their students about the service

Hair and beauty provides career advisory sessions in the pre-vocational course and helps students find and gain apprenticeshi

Electronics students use the employment service to help them find full-time and part-time work. The self-paced program allow students to work casually for a couple of weeks and return to study when the work stops or they have earned the extra money needed.

Practice firm students expected the employment services would assist them find part-time work (while they are studying) or a job when they have finished the course.

Support in understanding workplace culture

Hair and beauty teachers take pre-vocational students through a session on what they should expect during their work placement and a follow-up session when they return to TAFE. Students' log books detail the responsibilities of the employer and student, and what the work placement should achieve.

Electronics students considered that their self-paced course had prepared them well as they are self motivated and have learnt time management, both essential for working in the electronics industry.

The practice firm, being a simulated business, introduces students to an office 'culture'.

Support from peers

Informal support

Hair and beauty students are encouraged to work with a 'study buddy'. All students are encouraged to work together as the industry wants people who work well together.

Informal groups of electronics students work together and help each other. As students are at different stages, they can always find another student who has completed the activity and can provide help. Teachers often draw other students into problem-solving discussions, especially students who have just completed the activity because it reinforces the learning.

In the practice firm, students are encouraged to work together and ask each other if they have a problem or do not know something. There is a good team spirit and they usually help each other.

Peer tutoring

Electronics has a peer tutoring scheme. The peer tutors are selected for their expertise in a particular content area and ability to facilitate the student's learning rather than telling them how to solve problems. Tutors find the experience valuable as it reinforces their knowledge.

Learner Support Services runs a peer tutoring program to assist students with content knowledge. An appropriate peer, usually someone who has recently completed the module, is found who works on a one-to-one basis with the student for between 12–20 hours. Peer tutoring is successful as student completion rates are high. Tutors gain from the experience as it broadens their horizons.

Role and value of learner support

Most teachers regard themselves as the primary support providers. Some teachers regarded this as their main role. All teachers interviewed agreed that learner support is essential. Reasons quoted were:

Without it, attrition rates would be higher.

People have different needs, learning styles, different personal circumstances, and these change with time so they need individual support.

About 60–70% of hair and beauty students would not pass without it.

In electronics, an integrated support system is necessary for this type of delivery.

The provision of support is a major part of the practice firm teacher's role.

All students interviewed considered that the support was vital to their success. An electronics student summarised their views well:

> *It helps you get started and to pass. Without the support it just would not work. You would drop out—you would not stick it!*

Responsibility for providing and seeking support

Hair and beauty students feel that people who do not ask get behind, so it is best to ask.

The aim of the electronics program area is to encourage students to be self-motivated, independent learners. Although mentors approach students who appear to be having trouble completing module/s, the onus is on students to seek assistance.

Practice firm students usually take the initiative. The teacher's role is to be aware that they are having problems, monitor how they are going, make sure they know they can ask the group and come to her for help. LRC staff encourage students to ask for help. However, as many students do not recognise that they need help the librarian has to be prepared to intervene and offer help, sometimes in a subtle or indirect way.

Student Services consider that the responsibility is jointly shared between the student, teacher and learner support staff. However, the institute has a responsibility to provide support.

Improvements suggested

Teachers interviewed considered that the self-paced mode of delivery that had been developed at Tea Tree gully is highly successful. However, they suggested the following improvements:

LRC staff

- 24-hour computer access
- longer opening hours for LRCs

Employment Services staff

- secure funding—it is a growing area with an expanding need
- most students need help with resume preparation

Hair and beauty teachers

- support should be incorporated into contract time (of contract teachers)
- teachers need regular staff development in identifying and addressing literacy problems
- employment services presence at all campuses
- there should be more services available to evening students
- literacy studies should be included in the Bachelor of Adult Education to help teachers address literacy problems appropriately
- support should be a formal part of the learning program.
- more time to provide help for students

Conclusion

Tea Tree Gully Campus has a well-developed, self-paced system in place, that is heavily dependent upon teachers facilitating and supporting student learning. The three program areas described in this case study are very different. However, they have each developed processes and support structures that suit the courses offered and the needs of the students enrolled. Students interviewed considered that all three program areas had developed very effective learning environments, which were providing the type of support they needed.

Totalcare Industries Pty Ltd, ACT

Introduction

The organisation

Totalcare Industries is one of the largest employers in the ACT and comprises eight businesses that together, and in combination with other companies under strategic partnership arrangements, offer a full complement of services to a wide range of clients. Services offered are:

- building maintenance
- engineering maintenance
- environmental services
- facilities management
- fleet services
- linen services
- project delivery
- sterilising services
- consultancy services

Types of training discussed

Because Totalcare Industries is such a large and diverse organisation, a wide range of different types of training occurs. Discussions focussed on training in the administrative area and in the engineering maintenance business unit. A variety of training was discussed, including apprenticeships, traineeships, in-house short courses, and short courses provided by external providers.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

On the job

Various types of learner support help ensure people learn the skills they need to do their work effectively. For on-job learning, co-workers and supervisors are the main source of assistance for employees, whether or not they are engaged in a formal traineeship or apprenticeship

Resources

Procedures manuals for each work area are used as checklists and reminders of correct procedures, and, in the central training administration area, a multimedia computer is being set up which will have tutorials on it for people to access. In the administrative area there is also a library of books, tapes and videos.

Apprentices and trainees said most support for the content of their learning comes from teachers at the external providers of off-job training, for example, Canberra Institute of Technology and Quest, and the people in the workplace that they work with.

Opportunities

Other forms of support include:

- flexibility in working hours to support study
- opportunities at work for apprentices and trainees to complete homework and workplace help with this
- time off funded through Study Bank where warranted, as well as reimbursement of costs

Incentives

Employees

The Study Bank fund is used to pay for training which is critical to the work of the employee and also provides 65% reimbursement of fees and books for external study. Apprentices pay their own fees for off-job training upfront and are reimbursed 100% of these on successful completion. Traineeship fees are paid by Totalcare Industries upfront and trainees' books are also supplied.

Most employees are currently motivated to learn because the training helps them to do their job, to have a range of skills and qualifications—especially transferrable skills and portable qualifications—and most of the training they do is nationally accredited.

Employees also often get a pat on the back from the public when they are out working, or from organisations helped by Totalcare.

Apprentices and trainees

The apprentices and trainees said they were motivated by various things. These included:

- wanting to work in the particular trade
- simply wanting to do well
- learning broad-based transferable skills at CIT/Quest even if these are not all used at work
- enjoyment at the workplace
- friendly co-workers
- assistance from co-workers

The supervisor/assessor agreed that different people are driven by different things. He gained great personal satisfaction from being able to set up training especially since the signs and lines course, originally conceived at Totalcare, has now become a national training package. Totalcare staff worked together with the Roadmarking Association and with Construction Training Australia in developing the training package, and this has raised the occupation to trade status.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

There is now no formal support provided in basic literacy/numeracy skills because the WELL program that used to run has been discontinued due to changes in funding arrangements.

Personal/emotional problems

Totalcare pays a retaining fee for an employee assistance scheme for such assistance as mediation and counselling. Totalcare also has an in-house formal counselling process as part of performance management. Apprentices/trainees felt they would ask friends at work for

help with personal problems, but it would depend on the individual and the problem and the union might be the first point of call for assistance

Disabilities

Rather than having a set procedure, each person would be assessed individually to determine their needs and support required would be provided by the relevant business unit.

Support in job seeking/career development

In future the introduction of a human resource management computer system will be used to help with career path planning. Generally for Totalcare employees, a straight-line career path is clear, but there is not a lot of room for an extended career path and people with ambitions may look at going elsewhere. A consistent staff development planning process is also being introduced.

Support in understanding workplace culture

There is an induction program for each business unit, which is being revised, and in future all new employees will be given a consistent general induction to the organisation, followed by a workplace induction in their business unit. EEO and OH&S will be taught centrally and then a common checklist will be used by business units to ensure they cover the same types of information in their local induction.

Support from peers

There are various informal peer support arrangements in place in different Totalcare business units, but no formal peer support operates.

Role and value of learner support

Assessment of support needs

The Training Manager and Co-ordinator believed that business units need to be responsible for identifying the skills they need and developing a staff development plan for their unit and that line managers and supervisors need to take responsibility for this work. They also felt individual employees have to drive needs identification to some extent, but there should be a budget in each unit to provide the skills people need to do their job. They explained that they are trying to make HR more strategic, and devolve responsibility to line managers to develop a training plan as part of their business plan. They recognised that sometimes this is hard for business unit managers because they don't always know what skills they will need until they know what business they are going to be getting into.

It was generally agreed that, without the current levels of support as a minimum, people would not get the skills they need to do their jobs. The apprentices believed that available learner support has reduced and if things get worse it would be very hard for them. The office trainee agreed that without the support it would have been very difficult and scary for her to fit into the workplace and know what was expected of her.

Evaluation

A great deal of training is provided by external training providers and this is evaluated in order to ensure value for money. Monthly training reports are written on how much has been spent and who has attended what, but these are not currently analysed. Apprentices and trainees were not formally asked for their feedback, but felt people in the workplace were approachable and 'always ask how things are going', so it is largely up to apprentices and trainees to speak up if something is wrong. The organisation QA processes help ensure constant improvement.

Improvements suggested

The training manager/co-ordinator suggested:

- business units responsible for identifying their training needs; common needs could then be co-ordinated
- an in-house training facility owned by the company, especially for computer training
- more notice of upgrades in corporate software so training to support them can be planned

The supervisor/assessor suggested:

- giving people more workplace training before sending them out on the job, and also a lot more training on the job, that is, ideally one day a week
- multi-skilling and cross-disciplinary problem-solving.

The apprentices suggested:

- a secure job after the apprenticeship
- more tradespeople to work with and a wider range of tradespeople to learn from and use as role models
- more people 'to push you to learn and practise your skills'
- a wider scope of work, with more variety of tasks to make work more interesting and to practise a wider range of skills 'so we don't lose them once we've learned them'
- the office trainee suggested that upgrading all the computers to the same level of software would make things easier when using different computers, and also that childcare might be useful for some people

Conclusion

Totalcare is an organisation undergoing major changes of structure and culture in changing from a government department to a business enterprise.

The organisation is made up of diverse and largely separate business units and some have managed the changes in supporting learners and training more successfully than others. Despite the difficulties, the Engineering Maintenance unit has undertaken ground-breaking work in developing the Training Package in Signs and Lines in which Totalcare has been recognised both nationally and internationally for the leadership role taken.

Apprentices and trainees nominated as the best aspects of support:

- getting paid to develop skills and use them
- the recent extra training provided in signs and lines
- having a job where you can get extra skills

Totalcare is facing many of the common dilemmas of modern business organisations in relation to training and learning:

- whether to fund infrastructure in-house or outsource training, or what mix of both to aim for
- how to foster individual and business unit commitment to learning
- how to maintain the organisation skill level while reducing in size and losing experienced people
- how to use training/learning systems to ensure employees can cope with rapidly changing demands

Warner Bros. Movie World, Queensland

Introduction

The organisation

Warner Bros. Movie World is one of a group of leading Australian tourist attractions owned by Warner Village Theme Parks and including Sea World, Wet & Wild Water World and Sea World Nara Resort, which together employ 1200 'cast members'.

Because of both the size and the variety of entertainment and facilities offered within the park, there are over 300 different job roles and position descriptions. The key divisions are Food and Beverage, Shows and Entertainment, Retail, Operations, Technical Services, Finance and Administration and support departments, including Human Resources and Marketing.

Types of training discussed

The types of training discussed at Warner Bros. Movie World included on and off-job in-house training, both in structured training programs such as traineeships and in less formal short courses. The range of training is wide, including food and beverage service, retail skills, drama and dance, Japanese, first aid, operation of rides, safety and evacuation skills, and administrative and management training.

Issues explored

Support for content of learning

All staff are recruited with the basic skills required to do their jobs. Operations staff are auditioned for presentation skills and aptitude and then basic skills assistance in the form of drama and voice coaching are provided so that they can present scripts credibly.

Dancers, singers and actors employed in Shows and Entertainment are also auditioned and once employed can access tapes and videos of character routines and shows to assist in learning, for example, the range of standard mannerisms for Bugs Bunny or Marilyn Monroe. Dancers are recruited with a dance background, and singers for their voices, but less experienced people who audition successfully may start as 'suits', that is, dressed up as Tweety Pie, Batman or Robin or as chaperones who assist the 'suits' around the park by being their eyes and ears.

Most initial training is on the job and practical in nature. However, there are retail policy and procedures manuals in every retail outlet and task breakdown sheets which detail how to complete every facet of the retail operation from opening procedures to closing procedures, including how to guide new employees through induction for the outlet. These can be taken home to study if desired.

Most sections operate a competency-based matrix system designed to encourage continued learning and multi-skilling. Employees can work through manuals and ask to be assessed when they feel they are ready to move up a level and each level is linked to a small pay increase. There is generally scope for training to be repeated until the person is successful, within reason.

There is currently a proposal to access government funds and develop a Tourism Skills Centre co-operatively with the other theme parks in the group, using national modules, which may involve setting up a learning resource centre.

A large stock of training manuals, print materials and audio/video tapes are provided, in addition to the training sessions. There are condensed books on audiotape that can be

borrowed and listened to, for example, while driving. HR prints and distributes a list of these every couple of months, as they are accessible for all staff to borrow.

Full- and part-time permanent employees generally have the same opportunities and treatment with regard to training and support. However, full-timers are expected to take more responsibility and therefore receive more training.

Trainees experienced few problems balancing learning and work as training mainly takes place on the job.

Incentives

A wide variety of incentives to learn were reported by training, HR and supervisory staff, including:

- linking of training to a skill matrix with pay increases for achievement of each level (for example, as many as 36 levels within a job role, each attracting 20–30 cents an hour pay rise)
- training a form of motivation in itself—most people want to attend in-house courses and have fun learning
- exposure to other properties, for example, Sea World, when training is carried out in conjunction with them, traineeships and supervisory/management training
- desire to achieve
- awards/prizes varying from vouchers for a free lunch or Daffy Dollars to spend in the park, fruit baskets and bottles of wine, through to Employees of the Month and Year, the latter winning an overseas trip
- a culture of positive feedback, where supervisors are taught to provide verbal feedback, thanks are passed on from senior management after special events, and team meetings are used to iron out problems/celebrate successes
- variety in work and extra responsibility for multi-skilled employees
- opportunities for the largely casual workforce to obtain permanent positions as their skills increase
- the opportunity to dress up and be treated as a superhero every day at work (for example, Batman, Superman, and other 'stars')
- opportunity for regular work for actors, singers and dancers
- system of promotion from within that means real opportunities exist for a career with Warner Bros. Movie World

Motivation reported by trainees is largely in the job opportunities provided by the training and the helpfulness of staff along the way. Staff on the job were even prepared to help trainees with exam revision and assignments for their off-job training.

Incentives reported by other learners include good supervisors who are helpful, interesting work, and incentive schemes such as employee of the month and the year. Every month there are free drinks and food at the award ceremony for employee of the month, and once a year employees' partners can also go to the ceremony for employee of the year.

Other incentives mentioned by learners were:

- For every 160 hours worked, staff get a free pass to Movie World and another two passes as a bonus at Christmas time.
- The matrix system links skill/competency development with pay increases and provides more varied work.
- In-house training is usually good fun and provides the employee with a different environment for a couple of hours.
- 'They do a lot for the staff here'.

HR, training and supervisory staff described a wide variety of financial support for learning. Specialised, work-related training held in-house is free and completed during working hours, while external training and some in-house courses not immediately relevant to the person's role may be partially subsidised.

Meeting the special needs of learners

Literacy/numeracy

HR is usually the first point of contact for basic skills assistance, but it may depend upon where the person works in the park. HR can organise one-to-one coaching or literacy/numeracy training and may involve external providers (for example, TAFE) or access funded training after undertaking an in-house needs analysis. These programs are offered on a voluntary basis and provide employees an opportunity to enhance or improve their abilities and skills.

Personal/emotional problems

Many employees handle these outside work, or with the assistance of workmates who are also friends. If their work performance is impaired or they choose to seek help at work, HR is usually where personal problems would be handled, but individual supervisors/managers may also assist where they feel able to do so, or if little more than a sympathetic ear is needed. If necessary, pay advances, special leave or light duties may be organised in individual cases. A team environment is fostered and performers, for example, gather in their Green Rooms where problems may be shared. Special counselling services may be engaged by the organisation, in for instance, cases of deaths occurring at or on the way to work.

In other situations, for example, marital breakdown, drug and alcohol dependence, referral to specialised counselling at the employee's expense may be suggested.

Disabilities

People with disabilities can be both guests to the park and also cast members who have special needs that must be met. In recognising this, Warner Bros. Movie World introduced guest service training to improve cast members' knowledge and understanding of how to look after people with disabilities.

There are however very few employees at Movie World with special needs because of disabilities, and assistance is provided as needed by individuals both in training and the workplace.

Support for job seeking/career development

Pre-employment

Career development opportunities begin even before formal employment with Warner Bros. Movie World offering work placement opportunities to school and university students. Each year, over 200 students undertake work placements with the park, varying in duration from one to four weeks. Teachers have also been offered five-day placements to maintain the currency of their skills.

Training and development

In recognising the need to look at the park and its operations with fresh eyes and enthusiasm, Warner Bros. Movie World's staff development program includes sending cast members to attend relevant external workshops and seminars. As well as career development, this also extends to personal development.

Many in-house training programs are extended to all Warner Bros. Movie World staff with an interest, even though the program does not relate to their current job. The park also offers

general development courses for staff including cocktail making, wine appreciation, first aid, public speaking, literacy and time management.

Employment opportunities

All vacancies are advertised internally, for the three local theme parks as well as for other properties in the group. There are examples of employees moving across a number of sections to pursue a career, perhaps the most impressive of these being that the current CEO of Warner Bros. Movie World began as a stunt water-skier at Sea World.

Support in understanding workplace culture

Induction

New members of staff are welcomed to Warner Bros. Movie World with:

- a one-day general induction program, *Act one, scene one*, which includes visiting the Police Academy Stunt Show, meeting each other and workmates
- a department/section orientation
- being matched with an experienced buddy
- their uniform which is a symbol of belonging and a 'leveler'
- print information about the park, their job, benefits, policies and procedures

Work rotation

Trainees said they were able to rotate around various locations and therefore get the opportunity to meet many people and enjoyed wearing uniform that helps them feel part of the team.

Support from peers

New staff in most sections, with the exception of administrative staff, are assigned to an experienced 'buddy' or a supervisor following their park and department orientations.

Role and value of learner support

Support for learners is a fully integrated part of overall employee support. The structured approach to induction, initial training and supervision, performance management and rewards means that employees are constantly encouraged to learn and improve their performance whether involved in formal learning or not.

Evaluation

Formal evaluation takes place in some in-house training courses but not all and this is expected to increase now RTO status has been achieved. Employee surveys are undertaken at least once a year to obtain feedback about various aspects of the park's operations and levels of employee satisfaction. At regular performance appraisals, employees have the opportunity to provide feedback. No statistics are kept specifically about support services.

Improvements suggested

Even given an ideal world and an unlimited budget, most HR training and supervisory staff had difficulties thinking of suggestions for improvements to support arrangements. However, the following suggestions, not all about support services, were made:

- more training, that is, more of everything currently offered
- more in-house provision of training rather than external courses, for example, in food handling safety, which could be more focused on specific needs at Warner Bros. Movie World and provide opportunities for sharing information internally

- more refresher courses—short versions to remind people of correct procedures/safety/etc
- employment of training officers specifically for F&B and Retail
- employment of a part-time workplace counsellor
- on-site subsidised child care centre
- new uniforms
- better green rooms
- more computer training to reduce waiting time to attend
- bigger shows and better props, especially a telephone box for Superman!
- improved staff toilets, parking and canteen facilities

Learners were also hard pressed initially to think of improvements, but, given an ideal world and unlimited budget, they would suggest:

- more of the same courses, offered more frequently and short refresher courses
- performance measurement only against factors employees can control, for example, stock fluctuations can make sales targets impossible to achieve
- new uniforms 'which we are getting'
- a facelift for the canteen

Conclusion

The impression gained from visiting Warner Bros. Movie World is of a high-energy, happy workplace with a culture of constant feedback and support. Supervisory/managerial staff are aware of the need for constant encouragement of a high standard of work and have devised a range of incentives, including verbal feedback, to ensure employees always know how they are performing and have a reason to try to improve.

The best aspects of the current arrangements nominated by staff include the high quality of existing in-house training, emphasis on people-skills at all levels, friendly atmosphere, and the wide range of support available, especially from HR.

Learners said the most useful aspect of support at Warner Bros. Movie World is:

The whole package

Having been on the dole, this place gives me a future to look forward to

The people are the best thing, good supervisors and encouragement

It's a fun place to work

The park prides itself on excellence in customer service and is often regarded as the industry benchmark for this very crucial area of operation. The international and national awards won reflect the industry's faith in the standard of service provided to their guests at Warner Bros. Movie World.

Appendix B

Participating case study sites

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Appendix C

Information for case study participants

Information about site visits

Project aim

The purpose of this project will be to investigate how best students should receive informal or formal support to assist them enter and successfully complete vocational education and training within VET institutions (face-to-face and flexible delivery mode) and within those enterprises who train their employees.

Project approach

Each of the organisations involved in the project has designated a key contact person who is closely involved in supporting students or workplace learners. This person has the primary involvement in the benchmarking activity and will function as a 'co-researcher'. Each organisation will be visited by two people: the researcher and the co-researcher from the previously researched organisation. The visit will take approximately three days. This collaborative interaction between each organisation and the research project, and between the organisations themselves, will provide a professional development opportunity for the teachers and workplace trainers involved.

Primarily, the research will be investigating how best students/workplace learners should receive informal or formal support to assist them enter and successfully complete vocational education and training. It will revolve around the questions:

- What's working and why?
- What are the impediments, and why do they exist?
- What are the next critical steps?

Suggested structure for visit

Introduction of visitors to organisation staff

As the researchers will be at the organisation for approximately one to two days, it may help allay any concerns staff may have about the research if an opportunity exists for the researcher and the co-researcher to be introduced to staff. This could occur at, say, a staff morning tea. Any general questions about the research project could then be answered.

Introductory presentation

This could involve the organisation's manager, the designated teacher/workplace trainer, the visiting researcher and co-researcher. The existing activities and systems regarding provision of formal and informal learner support at the organisation will be presented as an overview.

Activities covered may include:

- background to the program
- components of learner support provided, both formal and informal
- promotion of the program
- professional development for teachers/workplace trainers
- student/learner profiles etc.

The visiting co-researcher will then present a brief overview of their organisation's particular learner support approach, followed by a general discussion on the similarities and differences between the two.

Meetings and interviews

The host teacher/workplace trainer will assist the research process by organising meetings and focus groups with:

- workplace trainers and assessors and teachers involved in providing learner support
- students/workplace learners (either in groups or individually)
- workplace supervisors not involved in workplace training but involved in supervising learners

Some survey distribution and collection may also be involved.

Final presentation on final day

Again, this could involve the manager, the designated teacher/workplace trainer and the two visitors. It may cover:

- observations by the host organisation of the research process
- feedback from the researcher and co-researcher on their learning and on their impressions of the organisation's learner support approach
- comments from visiting co-researcher about similarities and differences with their organisation's own learner support approach
- issues explored and future directions

Post visit

Survey collection may be required following the visit. Any additional data that comes to light may be collected and mailed or emailed to the researcher.

Within several weeks of the visit, the researcher will send a draft of the research analysis to the organisation's manager and relevant staff for comments. Once the organisation is satisfied that the research analysis is a true reflection of their organisation's student/learner support approach, the manager will return the draft, with comments, to the researcher.

All information from the organisations involved will form part of the final research report for the project, due in July, 1998.

Role of designated teachers/workplace trainers in the research process

Skills of the co-researcher

Part of the work of every teacher or workplace trainer involves research. In a process such as this, it is helpful to document the particular skills we will use. Generally, the type of skills required for anyone conducting research are:

- a genuine interest in the research area
- empathy and sincerity, to make respondents feel at ease

- listening skills—not doing too much of the talking
- questioning skills to encourage respondents to talk freely
- maintaining confidentiality
- keeping to the interview questions, to enable comparison of data
- impartiality/an ability to keep one's own bias aside. It is not the researcher's role to make judgements about the values and beliefs of respondents
- accurate note taking
- awareness of current issues within the research topic
- adherence to research code of ethics (see attached)

For those workplace trainers or teachers unfamiliar with conducting research, or with process benchmarking, Michelle Dickson from the Vocational Education and Assessment Centre (Ph 02-9448 4553), will be happy to assist with any questions teachers/workplace trainers may have.

Co-researcher as host

- Send to Michelle Dickson background information on the organisation and its learner support approach. This will assist the researcher and co-researcher in gaining some understanding of the organisation and its program before their visit.
- Prepare a more detailed presentation of the organisation's learner support approach, based around the research questions
  - What's working and why?
  - What are the impediments, and why do they exist?
  - What are the next critical steps?

Organise meetings and focus groups to assist with data collection at the organisation. The researcher and co-researcher will need to gather as much data and information about learner support as possible.

Co-researcher as visitor

When accompanying the researcher to the next organisation, the workplace trainer/teacher will take on the role of 'co-researcher'—assisting with a benchmarking investigation into the activities around student/learner support in that organisation.

The visiting teacher/workplace learner will also discuss learner support approaches at their own organisation, providing feedback and comments on differences and similarities.

The visiting workplace trainer/teacher may perform a number of tasks while at the host organisation, depending on requirements at the time. Such tasks may include note-taking from focus groups and interviews, conducting interviews with other teachers/trainers, distributing surveys, etc.

Role of workplace trainer/teacher following organisation visits

This project will doubtless provide the participants with many ideas for solving problems, making changes or improvements to activities and systems within learner support in their own organisations.

Many of these changes could benefit students/workplace learners by resulting in major enhancements in student satisfaction and course outcomes.

We are asking participants to keep a written record of any new ideas, problem-solving, innovative practices or any other changes they may make to their learner support services after being involved in the benchmarking process. These ideas and actions will be reported on within the final project report.

Appendix D

Case study interview schedules

Questions for discussion with trainers/assessors and support staff

For each of the listed types of learner support, discuss the issues relevant to this provider shown in the questions:

Questions / Types of support	What's available—what do you provide?	How do learners know—formally informally?	Is provision formal or informal?	What gaps in support are you aware of?	Do you refer to others? When, why and how?
Support for self-managed learning, e.g. ILC, CBT etc					
Learning support, e.g. basic skills, literacy, mentoring, coaching, study skills					
Resources, e.g. Induction manuals, videos, computer disks					
Peer support					
Support for learners with disabilities, e.g. hearing impairment					
Financial support for costs of learning or loss of income while learning					
Incentives to learn, financial and other, e.g. recognition, study leave					
Support with personal problems/ counselling					
Support in becoming part of a new workplace team or culture					
Support in the transition to new responsibilities/roles/balancing work and learning					
Support in career development or job search					
Other types of support, e.g. integration of on- & off-job training?					

Additional questions for discussion with trainers/assessors and support staff

1. Why is support necessary? What would happen if the support was not available?

2. Responsibility for learner support:
   - training provider?
   - the workplace?
   - individual learners?
   - external agencies?
   - other?

3. Does responsibility and provision of support vary for:
   - full time/part time student?
   - full time/part time employees in training?

4. Are support services evaluated? Formally or informally? What type of feedback is received and what is done with the feedback?

5. What statistics are there on the use of support?

Questions for discussion with learners

For each of the listed types of learner support, discuss the relevant issues shown in the questions:

Questions / Types of support	What type/s of support did you expect to receive?	What types of support are available?	How did you know about available support?
Learning support, e.g. basic skills, literacy, mentoring, coaching, study skills			
Support for self-managed learning, e.g. ILC, CBT etc			
Resources e.g. Induction manuals, videos, computer disks			
Peer support			
Support for learners with disabilities, e.g. hearing impairment			
Financial support for costs of learning or loss of income while learning			
Incentives to learn, financial and other, e.g. recognition, study leave			
Support with personal problems/ counselling			
Support in becoming part of a new workplace team or culture			
Support in the transition to new responsibilities/roles/balancing work and learning			
Support in career development or job search			
Other types of support, e.g. integration of on- & off-job training?			

Additional questions for discussion with learners

1. Why is support necessary? What would happen if the support was not available?

2. Responsibility for learner support:
   - training provider?
   - the workplace?
   - individual learners?
   - external agencies?
   - other?

3. Are you asked for feedback about the support services offered?

4. What is the most helpful aspect of the support offered here?

5. What other support would you like to have available?

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